



Sherburne School Workforce Housing Project 35 Sherburne Road, Portsmouth, NH



In response to Portsmouth's critical housing needs, the City partnered with Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA) and identified Sherburne School as a promising site for redevelopment into affordable housing. This effort was driven by the City's long-standing commitment, reinforced in its Master Plan, City Council priorities, and community dialogue, to increase the availability of housing that working families and individuals can afford. Following a competitive RFQ/RFP process in 2022, the PHA was selected from a pool of eight highly qualified local and national development firms to lead this important transformation.

The Sherburne Redevelopment Project will preserve and adapt a beloved school campus to create 127 new homes in a mix of one-, two-, and three-bedroom units. In contrast to many developments that minimize family-sized housing, this project is deliberately designed with a high proportion of two- and three-bedroom apartments to support young families who wish to stay in or move to Portsmouth. The site plan carefully balances density with livability, prioritizing green space, play areas, walking trails, and a community garden. The original brick façade of the Sherburne School will be preserved as a visible anchor, memorializing the building's history as a place of education and belonging.

This redevelopment is a critical step for the community and the affordable housing market because 100% of the units will be priced to align with the widely accepted benchmark of affordability: no more than one-third of a household's income spent on housing. It will allow workers to live where they work, stabilize family life, reduce traffic and emissions from commuting, and help businesses thrive by expanding the local workforce. The benefits will ripple through the local economy, from job creation in construction to increased purchasing power among residents.

Property & Context

Address: 35 Sherburne Road, Portsmouth, NH

Lot Size: 5.33 acres

Zoning: M (Municipal)

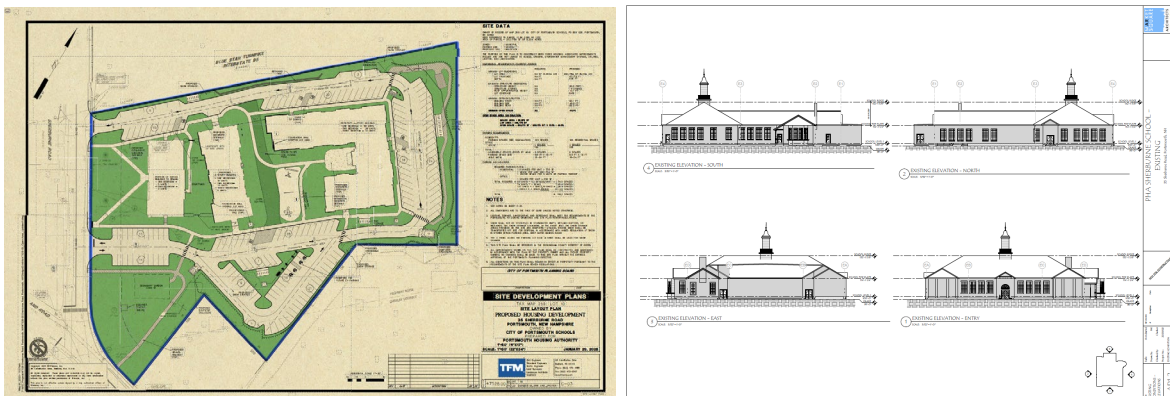
Former Use: Public school site, most recently Robert J. Lister Academy, an alternative high school

Building Details: ~18,000 square feet; original 1930 structure with 1985 addition

Valuation: \$4.96 million (City assessment)

Current Status: Vacant; designated for affordable housing by vote of the City Council

Sherburne is situated on a transitional parcel of land that bridges residential neighborhoods and commercial corridors, providing convenient access to local services, employment opportunities, and schools. The site is well-served by municipal water and sewer infrastructure and features mature trees and a flat topography that is ideal for walkability and future recreational amenities. As an adaptive reuse project, it provides an opportunity to preserve meaningful elements of the school's architecture and community identity while reimagining the site as a vibrant, livable residential community.



Partnerships & Community Collaboration

This redevelopment is rooted in organizational collaboration, with the Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA) and the City of Portsmouth at the helm. The City, which owns the land, has entered into a formal ground lease with PHA to ensure long-term affordability and community stewardship of the site.

The project also reflects deep community input. Residents, neighbors, and local advocates have helped shape the vision through public workshops, surveys, and design sessions. Their priorities—such as walkable green space, intergenerational gathering areas, and sustainable design—are reflected throughout the site plan. These contributions reinforce a shared goal: to build not just housing, but a neighborhood that strengthens the city's fabric.

Financing and Feasibility

The Sherburne Redevelopment is the product of years of planning and commitment, supported by a robust financial strategy that brings together federal, state, and local resources.

The project's funding sources include

- Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)
- Grants and soft loans from the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority (NHHFA)
- Equity investment from PHA
- CDFA Tax Credits, offered by the NH Community Development Finance Authority, which enable local businesses to invest in the project while receiving a 75% return through state tax relief.

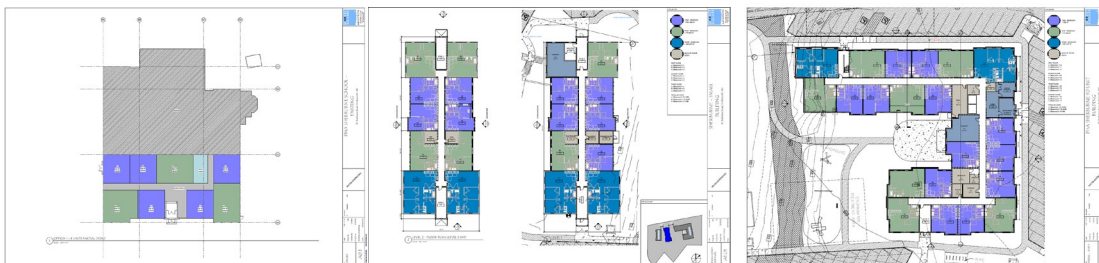
This layered financing approach ensures the project's viability while preserving affordability for future generations. By inviting mission-aligned banks, businesses, and public-sector partners into the fold, the financing model reflects both the complexity and the community spirit of this ambitious effort.

As commitments are finalized, the project is poised to enter predevelopment and construction phases with strong local and state backing.

Unit Mix and Housing Design

The Sherburne Redevelopment will deliver a total of 127 rental units across three distinct buildings. The unit mix is carefully designed to serve a range of household sizes and life stages, with a strong emphasis on family-oriented housing.

- 1-Bedroom Units: 72 (57%)
- 2-Bedroom Units: 41 (32%)
- 3-Bedroom Units: 14 (11%)



Front Building – 8 units

Middle Building – 29 Units

Rear Building – 90 Units

Unit Mix and Housing Design - Continued

This diverse mix reflects a commitment to supporting both smaller households and families with children, many of whom are priced out of the local market. A higher-than-average share of two- and three-bedroom units enables the project to meet the needs of working families who wish to reside in Portsmouth and enroll their children in local schools.

All residential buildings will be designed with universal accessibility in mind, incorporating features such as step-free entries, wide doorways, and elevator service in multi-story buildings. A portion of the units will be fully ADA-compliant, meeting or exceeding federal standards for mobility and sensory accessibility.

The project will adhere to all Fair Housing Act and Section 504 requirements, ensuring that people of all backgrounds, incomes, and abilities have access to high-quality housing free from discrimination. Affirmative marketing plans and inclusive outreach will be implemented as part of the lease-up process.

By combining design equity with functional flexibility, Sherburne will welcome residents of varying needs and lifestyles, fostering a vibrant, inclusive community from the ground up.

A Collaborative Process

The Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA) has long played a leading role in addressing the city's housing needs, both as a service provider and as Portsmouth's largest landlord. For over 70 years, PHA has developed housing with a focus on equity, economic stability, and community partnerships. Our public engagement work reflects that same mission.

Key Highlights:

- Sherburne Project Outreach (2023–2025):
 - Public meetings and neighborhood forums hosted with the City
 - Facilitated charrettes to gather input on design, layout, and amenities
 - Surveys and feedback tools distributed digitally and in print
 - Direct engagement with property abutters and stakeholder groups
- Broader Civic Involvement:
 - Active role in the Blue Ribbon Housing Committee, Land Use Committee, and City's Master Planning process
 - Educational partnerships, including Portsmouth Listens, Portsmouth TEDx, and Chamber Collaborative of the Greater Seacoast.

About the Developer

PHA Housing Development Ltd. is a Portsmouth Housing Authority (the PHA) nonprofit affiliate (collectively known as PHA) serving as the General Partner of PHA's tax credit portfolio and recipient of private funds that support PHA programming. The City of Portsmouth established the PHA in 1953 to address its safe, sanitary, and affordable housing shortage for low-income people. The PHA built its first development in 1959. Today, PHA is a dynamic organization that has developed and manages 682 permanently affordable rental apartments, housing over 1,000 people.

PHA's Tax Credit portfolio includes 60 units of senior-only housing, 100 units of family housing, 64 units of workforce housing, and 24 units reserved exclusively for people with physical disabilities. Three properties in PHA's Housing portfolio, the Atlantic Heights School, Lafayette School, and the former Cottage Hospital, preserved critical historic resources in the city.

As a skilled developer, PHA effectively leverages LIHTC and public and private financing to create affordable housing. The organization's highly efficient Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program allocates 462 vouchers for Housing Choice, Project, Tenant Protection, and Foster Youth to Independence Vouchers.

PHA has a skilled development team comprised of professionals with experience in affordable housing development, finance, construction, and operations. PHA employs 32 full-time staff, including specialists providing asset and property management for our tax-credit portfolio. The credentials of this team include Certified Credit Compliance Professional (C3P), Blended Occupancy Management, National Standards for Physical Inspection of Real Estate Specialist, Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing Rent Calculation, & Tax Credit Certifications.

PHA's most recent success was the development of the award-winning Ruth Lewin Griffin Place workforce housing project in downtown Portsmouth. Ruth's Place was named the 2022 Building of the Year by the US Green Building Council NH Chapter as the highest-scoring LEED project in New Hampshire. PHA's achievements have also been recognized with the prestigious Plan NH Merit Award of Excellence, the Visionary Leadership Award from the Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast, and the Chamber Collaborative of the Greater Seacoast Building a Better Community Award—Chamber Collaborative 2022 award, underscoring our commitment to excellence and innovation in affordable housing.

PHA's \$106 million in real estate assets are a critically important piece of the city's infrastructure, significantly contributing to the city's housing needs. Its residents and staff are at the heart of the city's civic and social fabric. The PHA is the largest public housing authority per capita in New Hampshire, housing nearly 4.5% of the city's population.

The PHA is the City of Portsmouth's largest landlord, a lead participant in the conversation about the need for additional affordable housing, and a resource identified by the elected and appointed officials, the business community, the thriving arts

community, and the general public who have been calling on the city to address the pressing community need for affordable housing.