

# Affordable housing project at West Newton armory OK'd by zoning board

By [John Hilliard](#) Globe Staff, Updated January 17, 2023, 9:54 p.m.



The city of Newton is working with Metro West Collaborative Development and Civico Development to turn the West Newton armory on Washington Street into affordable housing. CIVICO DEVELOPMENT

The long-sought affordable housing development at the site of the historic city-owned armory in West Newton will move ahead after the Zoning Board of Appeals approved the project earlier this month.

The plan would create 43 affordable apartments in a new, four-story addition erected behind the castle-like headhouse on the property along Washington Street.

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, who proposed in 2019 that the city acquire the property from the state for housing, hailed the zoning board decision.

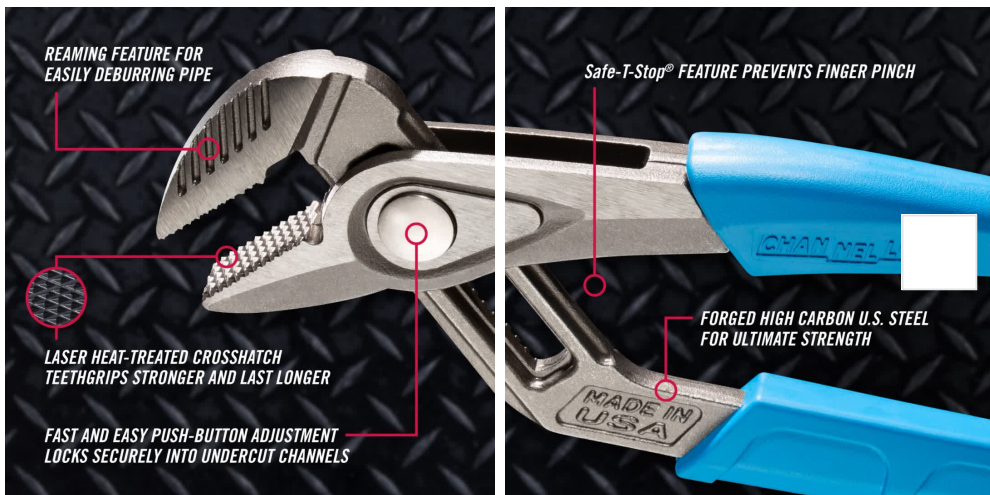
“This achievement is the culmination of nearly four years of strategic planning, collaboration, and careful attention to the many aspects of sensitively revitalizing an iconic building to serve people

needing deeply affordable apartments,” Fuller said in a statement.

In many housing developments, affordable units are often mixed with market-rate apartments to help finance construction and other costs. In the case of the armory project, the entire \$29.8 million development will be devoted to affordable housing.

The project will include one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments, 28 of them for households earning up to 60 percent of the area median income, which is \$140,200 for a family of four in Newton, according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The other 15 apartments will be available to households earning 30 percent of that income level.

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The project would preserve the existing headhouse structure for community space and management offices for the property, and also will include a 31-space underground parking lot, according to project fillings. The armory’s current field house would be demolished to make way for the residential addition.

Fuller has allocated about \$5 million from local funds, including the Community Development Block Grant and Community Preservation Act money. The project also will be supported by a mix of federal and state grants, according to the city.

The armory, located on about three-quarters of an acre at 1135 Washington St., was designed by the architectural firm Mulcahy and McLaughlin in the Medieval Revival style and erected in 1910.

The building was long used by the National Guard, but by 2019, the state had offered it for sale for housing use. The site is next door to a Trader Joe's, several MBTA bus stops, and just a few minutes' walk to West Newton Square.

The City Council approved the purchase in 2021 after a city advisory board recommended Newton use the armory for affordable housing.

The city is developing the property in partnership with Metro West Collaborative Development and Civico Development. In 2021, Fuller chose the development team — and its plan to build 43 affordable units — from seven proposals submitted to the city.

The armory project was proposed under the state's Chapter 40B, which allows developers of affordable housing to waive some local zoning rules. The city's Zoning Board of Appeals unanimously approved the project during its Jan. 11 meeting.

Fuller said the project's groundbreaking is anticipated in the spring of 2025, and a ribbon-cutting is scheduled for the fall of 2026.

Proponents for building more affordable housing in the city hailed the zoning board's approval of the project.

City officials and local advocates have long sought to bring more affordable units to Newton, including calling for millions of federal pandemic aid to be used to create affordable housing.

Greater Boston is a pricey place to live, but Newton is exceptionally so: The median cost for a single-family home in the Garden City was above \$1.2 million in December, according to the real estate website Redfin.

Meanwhile, paying the monthly rent for a Newton apartment eats a sizable chunk of a tenant's paycheck. The median rent for a one-bedroom apartment was about \$2,150 this month, [zillow.com](https://www.zillow.com) reported. Rent figures in the city range between \$1,250 to nearly \$6,500, according to the real estate site.

Emily Cagwin, a cochair for Uniting Citizens for Housing Affordability in Newton, said in an e-mail that the armory project will meet an “urgent need” in Newton.

“When community members aren’t worried about affording rent, they are better able to achieve economic mobility,” Cagwin said. “And children whose parents have stable, affordable housing have better health and educational outcomes.”

David Rockwell, a spokesman for the Newton affordable housing advocacy group Engine 6, called the armory development an “exciting, sustainable” affordable housing project for Newton.

“It is a rare and wonderful opportunity to bring 43 units of affordable housing for low- and very-low-income families into our city,” Rockwell said.

Greg Reibman, the president of the Charles River Regional Chamber, said in an e-mail that the armory would play an important role in creating more affordable housing in Newton.

“This is another win in the city’s efforts to address a chronic housing crisis and bring vitality to the Washington Street corridor,” Reibman said. “Certainly we wish the project would take less than seven years to develop but it’s still the exact right use for the former armory and will make a meaningful difference for 43 families.”

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