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New housing secretary tours former high school and Wright Building, highlighting new apartments

By Nate Harrington, The Berkshire Eagle
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Secretary of Housing Juana Matias, center, visits one of the classrooms in the former St. Joseph's High School in Pittsfield with developer David Carver, right.

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PITTSFIELD — Starting at the former [St. Joseph High School](#) and ending at the [Wright Building](#), Juana Matias, the state housing secretary, got to see the bones of one burgeoning housing project in Pittsfield and the final product of another.

"We love coming to the ground and seeing how people are leveraging public taxpayer dollars to help address the issue of our time, which is housing production," said Matias, who started her role in March. "Today is a day to just highlight great work."

On Monday, Matias toured housing projects in various stages of completion in Pittsfield alongside city officials and housing advocates. The Wright Building, at 255 North St., has all apartments leased and street-facing commercial spaces coming soon. Plans for the former high school, at 22 Maplewood Ave., are just beginning, with initial site-work projected to start soon.

The housing developments show Pittsfield's commitment to combating the housing crisis, Matias said. The city is "making sure that if there is a resource at the state level ... that the city is leveraging it to make sure that they're meeting their housing needs."



Secretary of Housing Juana Matias, second from left, visits the former St. Joseph's High School in Pittsfield with from left, state Rep. Trisha Farley-Bouvier, Director of Community Development Justine Dodds, Mayor Peter Marchetti and Developer David Carver.

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Matias was appointed to the role after Ed Augustus stepped down in February. She has previously served as a Massachusetts state representative and as the regional administrator for the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Joe Biden. This was her first public visit to the Berkshires in her new role.

Matias started the tour at the St. Joseph High School project, which is being designed and developed by Scarafoni Associates. David Carver, a partner at the firm, walked Matias through the plans to transform the school into a mixed-use space that will include 19 apartments.



Officials stand outside in front of the former St. Joseph's High School in Pittsfield following a tour of the interior on Monday.

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There will be 14 one-bedroom and five two-bedroom apartments in the building, with rents ranging from \$1,700 to \$1,900, Carver said.



After years empty, St. Joseph's High School site could see new life as housing
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Those apartments will be housed in the "horseshoe" part of the building that envelops the gymnasium, he said. The gymnasium is planned to be a community space, and the lower-level will be leased to the YMCA for its child care center.

The child care and community spaces will have an entrance on Maplewood Avenue, while the residences will have an entrance in the back, Carver said. A portion of the back of the school – the additions where the stage in the gymnasium is – will be demolished, which will create room for parking.



The former St. Joseph High School will become 19 apartments as part of Scarfoni Associates plan to renovate the school. Part of the project will remove a portion of the school, including the stage area.

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Parking is necessary for an apartment complex in Pittsfield, as the city has few public transportation options, said state Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, D-Pittsfield.

The project has a preliminary cost of \$8 million, and the building was purchased for \$175,000 after the school and its property was excised from the neighboring church, Carver said. Although the permitting and design process isn't done, repairs to the roof could begin in "30 to 45 days," he said, with the full renovation kicking off in January 2027.



A hallway in the former St. Joseph's High School in Pittsfield. The building will be renovated into a mixed-use space that will include 19 apartments.

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The shell of the vacant high school — with paint peeling and ceiling tiles missing — stood in stark contrast to Allegrone Cos.' renovation of the Wright Building, which Matias visited next.

That project already has all 35 apartments leased, said Lou Allegrone, president of the Berkshire developer. There are 21 two-bedroom and 14 one-bedroom apartments, with one of each being reserved for affordable housing.

The market-rate rents are \$1,800 to \$1,900 for a one-bedroom unit and \$2,000 to \$2,400 for the two-bedroom units, Allegrone said. The one- and two-bedroom affordable units rent for \$1,400 and \$1,600, respectively.

Allegrone awarded first grant as part of new state program helping turn



commercial buildings into apartments

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The \$20 million project had two sides to it, with one half preserving the original tin and brick from the former Wright building and the other building features new finishes, he said. The project will also have commercial space available soon, with multiple small retail spaces and one for a restaurant on the corner.

Allegrone purchased the former furniture store building in 2018 for \$675,000.



Secretary of Housing Juana Matias, center, visits one of the apartments in the newly renovated Wright Block on North Street in Pittsfield. From left, are Mayor Peter Marchetti, Matias, and Lou Allegrone.

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The project received \$4.5 million in Housing Development Incentive Program grants, which are for housing projects in Gateway Cities, Allegrone said.

Pittsfield welcomes 37 new studio apartments and a housing resource center

These units continue to show Pittsfield's commitment to building new housing, including helping Berkshire County make the third-most progress toward its state housing goal, according to new data released by the administration.

That data will help improve responses to the housing crisis, Matias said. And the state will "highlight communities that are doing well, like here, who are punching above their weight."

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