

Bethany Hill School

Bethany Hill School, Inc., Framingham, Massachusetts

On a 100-acre semi-rural campus in Framingham, Mass., the Bethany Hill School provides affordable housing and educational opportunities for 42 low-income families and individuals. The natural surroundings and preserved 1920s-style architecture of the building combine to create a unique and supportive environment where residents with diverse backgrounds and needs can progress toward their individual life goals.

The Organization

Jointly developed in the early 1990s by the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston, the South Middlesex Opportunity Council, and other sponsors in the metro area, Bethany Hill School, Inc. was established specifically to oversee the rehabilitation and operations of the housing project. Through its work at Bethany Hill School, the organization is fulfilling its mission of providing affordable independent housing with educational opportunities as a means of empowering residents. Overseen by a Board of Trustees made up of members of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and individuals from the community, Bethany Hill School acts as the asset manager of property, while Maloney Properties, Inc., a well-known and well-regarded manager of 65 Boston-area housing developments comprising 7,500 units, manages the building and grounds.

Committed to fostering the personal development of its residents, Bethany Hill School provides educational, social and community-building programs on-site through the work of a full-time program director and a part-time assistant program director. The services staff takes direction regarding program offerings from the Board of Trustees and resident committees. On-site management staff



Originally constructed in the 1920s, the Bethany Hill School is a unique building that provides housing for low-income families and individuals in the Boston area.

includes a part-time property manager, a part-time assistant property manager and a full-time maintenance superintendent, all of whom are supervised by Maloney Properties.

The Sisters of Saint Joseph sponsor nine ministries in the Boston area, and the Bethany Hill School is its only rental property providing housing to individuals outside of its membership. Founded in the late 1800s, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston have been working for more than 70 years to provide educational and health services to the community.

The Project

Bethany Hill School's 42 housing units are wholly contained in the 1920s-era rehabilitated school building and are available in a range of sizes, from single rooms for individuals to four-bedroom apartments for families. Originally built by the Sisters of Saint Joseph as an educational residence, the school's architecture was largely preserved during rehabilitation and is consistent with the other buildings on the property, which are used as convent housing, a

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Project Type

Multifamily rental, permanent housing, some transitional units.

Resident Profile

Low-income, variety of disabilities and special needs

Rent Structure (monthly)

Sleeping Units (240 s.f.): \$390

Single Room Occupancy (287 s.f.): \$180

Efficiency (390 s.f.): \$988

1 BR (598 s.f.): \$1,100

2 BR (696 s.f.): \$1,299

3 BR (1066 s.f.): \$1,476

4 BR (1283 s.f.): \$1,792

Occupancy Rate

FY 2003: 93 percent

FY 2004: 92 percent

Key Features

42-unit converted school building on 100-acre campus, playground, basketball court, community garden, computer learning lab, children's room, community room.

Key Services

Educational opportunities and other supportive services suited to residents' needs and goals

Project Cost

Total project: \$1,758,000

Per unit: \$41,857

Contact Information

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health care center and a retirement facility. Although it is located on a sprawling 100-acre campus, Bethany Hill School is a short walk from the urban center of Framingham, providing residents with a connection to the larger community without the typical congestion and noise associated with city life.

Property Management Summary

Property management of Bethany Hill School is provided under contract by Maloney Properties through three staff members, who report to a regional supervisor and the Finance Committee of the Bethany Hill School Board of Trustees. The property management staff are responsible for marketing rental units, selecting and approving qualified applicants, collecting rents, enforcing leases, conducting preventive maintenance, processing vendor invoices, monitoring the budget and ensuring that the property complies with all housing laws. Drawing on its broad experience managing other affordable rental housing properties, Maloney Properties has developed systems to ensure successful operations and high satisfaction from both residents and asset managers.

Bethany Hill School’s finances are managed by the Maloney Properties central office, though the transactions themselves, such as rent collection and vendor invoice vouchering, occur at the facility. Following on-site financial transactions, invoices and deposit records are sent to the central office, where they are entered into an online general ledger accounting system. The central office produces monthly finan-



Home to many families, the Bethany Hill School offers several amenities that cater to the specific needs of its residents, such as this playground for children.

cial reports with budget narratives for review by the Board of Trustees and the Board’s Finance Committee. Finally, annual independent audits are conducted with the cooperation of on-site staff, Maloney Properties accounting department and the Sisters of Saint Joseph finance department.

A well-defined maintenance delivery system is in place to ensure that problems are expeditiously fixed and preventive maintenance and capital improvements are completed on schedule. The property manager conducts a general inspection at least once a week, and resident apartments are inspected annually. On their own, these procedures result in a list of necessary work orders and other longer-term maintenance issues. In addition to problems found during inspections, residents are encouraged to report maintenance needs within their units promptly, and management pledges to respond the same day to requests received before 2 p.m. Larger property improvements are conducted according to a plan that was developed following a 20-year facility evaluation in 2000; this evaluation also serves as a capital budgeting tool, helping the property managers determine necessary replacement reserve contributions.

Asset Management Summary

Bethany Hill School’s asset management responsibility falls on the Board of Trustees, which sets goals and objectives and ensures that outcomes are met. The primary goals are to maintain affordable rents, provide educational programs that are responsive to resident need assessments, implement security procedures and risk and crisis management policies, and promote resident accountability. The project’s main sources of income are rental payments, grants, donations and mobile Section 8 vouchers, which have been limited in recent years because of state cutbacks, resulting in unforeseen vacancies. However, on the whole, the goals of Bethany Hill School have been met—including financial stability—without the necessity of large rent increases. With respect to crisis management, Maloney Properties staff has instituted several protocols to ensure crises are averted or minimized, including an on-site staff presence for 12 hours each day and a “resident responder,” who is charged with handling incidents during non-business hours.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BETHANY HILL SCHOOL, INC.

Physical Features

The unique facility and grounds of Bethany Hill School provide a peaceful, welcoming environment seldom found in affordable housing developments. Containing a fairly even mix of variously sized housing units, the building maintains much of its original features, including more than 400 large windows, marble staircases, high ceilings, and spacious corridors. In addition to more than 20 single room units, Bethany Hill School provides ample space for families in its nine four-bedroom and 10 two-bedroom units. Ramps at two entrances, wide apartment doorways and an elevator allow for the majority of the building's housing units to be accessible by wheelchair. To ensure resident safety, all apartments and common areas are equipped with sprinklers and alarms, and a keyless entry system is in place to control access.

Office and community spaces for programs and staff are in the basement. Also in the basement are a playroom for children, a laundry room, a computer lab and a community room. Because staff is situated away from the entrance, security cameras are posted around the property.

One of the more notable features of Bethany Hill School is its campus. Throughout the 100 acres of land, there are several spaces for socializing, play and quiet reflection. The campus includes a community garden where residents can plant and maintain plots, picnic benches in a shaded grove, a playground and basketball courts.

Resident Involvement

There are several avenues for both formal and informal resident involvement and interaction at Bethany Hill School. Many residents participate in program advisory committees, which offer recommendations on improvements to the educational and parenting programs. Furthermore, there are formal groups established to welcome new residents and plan community events, such as dinners, Earth Day celebrations and the Education Fair. Finally, all residents are encouraged to take part in quarterly meetings with the program and management staff to review policies and offer feedback on programs and building issues.

There are also numerous on- and off-site activities with varying degrees of structure available to residents, all of whom must participate in at least one program. These offerings include life skills and computer education, vocational training, parenting classes and other programs designed for special needs residents, such as those with HIV/AIDS or developmental disabilities. Finally, because of the strong presence of families at Bethany Hill School, there are several programs targeted to these residents—such as parenting classes, tutoring for children, summer camps and youth groups.

Community Impact and Neighborhood Relations

Due to its large campus, Bethany Hill School is somewhat isolated from its surrounding community. However, this has not precluded it from forming partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and cultural institutions. To be sure, Bethany Hill School has several formal and informal linkages to other organizations and uses these contacts to improve the lives of its current residents. Some of its partners include the Danforth Art Museum, Banknorth, the TJX Corporate Foundation, the Mass Bay Community College, Keefe Technical High School and Regis College.

Summary

Bethany Hill School is unique in many ways. Its mixed population, served by a wide array of housing choices and program offerings, draws strength from its diversity. The organization's financial stability, in the face of stagnating funding streams, demonstrates the effectiveness of a measured commitment to affordable housing, as well as the benefits of developing partnerships with other like-minded organizations. Finally, situated on its large, natural campus, Bethany Hill School is a fine example of the positive influence of aesthetically pleasing surroundings and keenly preserved architecture on the lives of residents and the performance of programs.