

Commercial Real Estate

Long-delayed Grimke School redevelopment breaks ground in Shaw



By Alex Koma – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
Oct 17, 2019, 7:15am EDT

After close to a decade of stops and starts, shovels will finally turn dirt on the redevelopment of the District's Grimke School.

Community Three Development is scheduled to break ground Thursday on the \$45 million project in Shaw, with a formal ceremony featuring Mayor Muriel Bowser to mark the milestone. The D.C.-based developer is aiming to deliver a first phase of the project by fall 2020, according to a release.

The development is set to include 133,000 square feet of mixed-use when it's finished, including the full renovation of the 132-year-old school at 1923 Vermont Ave. NW. The African American Civil War Museum will move from its space nearby to occupy about 12,000 square feet there under a 99-year ground lease.

In addition to working on the project, architecture and design firm Torti Gallas and Partners will also set up its new headquarters in the building, moving from Silver Spring. That will leave roughly 24,000 square feet of office still available for lease.

Community Three also plans to build a six-story condo building in the school's former parking lot, which is also

set to deliver in fall 2020. That will include 30 condos in all, including eight affordable units, and include ground-floor retail.

A second phase will transform the school's roughly 100-year-old gym into 40 apartments, including six "maker" studios with storefronts along 9 ½ Street NW. Local arts advocacy group CulturalDC plans to work with the developer to design and lease the homes, designed as "live-work spaces," according to the release. Community Three hopes to break ground on the building by 2021 or 2022.

The project's progress represents a major milestone for the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, which has long worked to bring in a partner for the redevelopment of the valuable, U Street Metro-adjacent site.

A key first step was moving the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services and the Department of Corrections out of the school, as the District pushed the agencies to the nearby Reeves Center (which is now being eyed for its own redevelopment) back in 2011.

By 2014, then-Mayor Vince Gray's administration began to push in earnest for development partners, and struck a deal with Roadside Development soon afterward. But those plans fell apart in late 2016, much to the dismay of many neighbors. Bowser's administration then turned to Community Three and Torti Gallas, a partnership that finished second in the original competition for the school's redevelopment. The current development team finalized an arrangement with the District by 2017.

Grimke was constructed in 1887 as the Phelps School and was renamed in 1934 for Archibald Grimke, a local civil rights leader and one-time president of the NAACP of Washington, D.C.