



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wheat Ridge Housing Authority Purchases Fruitdale School *Local Partnership with Colorado Preservation Inc. Begins*

WHEAT RIDGE – this week the City of Wheat Ridge Housing Authority (WRHA) acquired the Fruitdale School for a total cost of \$112,604 from the Jefferson County School District (Jeffco Schools). The school district sold the building and property to the City for \$1 and the other costs involved were associated with asbestos remediation. The two-story, red-brick building located at 10801 W. 44th Avenue was designed by renowned architect Temple Buell and built in 1927. Buell designed the Paramount Theater and the original Cherry Creek Shopping Center among other notable Denver buildings. Buell designed the Fruitdale School after the original school, constructed in 1883, burned down in late 1926. The elementary school remained open until 1978. Jeffco Schools used the building as a pre-school until 2007 when the Norma Anderson Pre-school opened adjacent to Fruitdale.

“After closure of the school, the building sat vacant and underutilized,” said Councilmember Joe DeMott, District IV and long-time area resident/business owner. “The Housing Authority had previously considered acquiring the property; however, renovation was not going to be feasible for financial reasons, given the market conditions at the time.”

Jeffco Schools worked with the City and the WRHA over a number of years in an attempt to transfer ownership. Demolition was delayed in 2010 while the City conducted analysis to determine the market viability of the property. The WRHA determined the acquisition was not practical and Jeffco Schools moved forward with demolition plans. In early April of 2011, the WRHA took another look at acquiring the property. Mayor Jerry DiTullio was very supportive of the WRHA purchasing the property. “I am very excited about the acquisition of the school and that the fate of the building will not be demolition,” added DiTullio. “Fruitdale is a landmark in our community and efforts to save the building are a reflection of the historical importance the building has in our community. Additionally, the City is very pleased with the cooperation and assistance by the School District in making the acquisition happen.”

Councilmember DeMott added, “I appreciate the efforts of our great staff who helped us respond to this unique opportunity quickly specifically, Ken Johnstone, Community Development Director, Sally Payne, Senior Planner and City Attorney Gerald Dahl, played an instrumental role in the acquisition process.”

Janice Thompson, resident and member of the WRHA, was once a student at Fruitdale School and recalls fond memories of her time at the school, “Fruitdale was a gathering place for community PTA events, plays, sporting events and a place to meet with friends and neighbors. The Fruitdale Valley took great pride in the school and it is a wonderful legacy to be saved.”

A partnership with Colorado Preservation Inc. (CPI), a state-wide preservation non-profit, developed after the organization heard about plans to demolish the building. Patrick Eidman

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WRHA Purchases Fruitdale School

added, "CPI is tremendously excited to be involved in the preservation of this important and historic community landmark. Historic schools are excellent candidates for reuse, and this project is particularly exciting given the relative scarcity of historic buildings in Wheat Ridge, its status as one of the few remaining vestiges of the community of Fruitdale, and of course that it was designed by the talented and well known Denver architect, Temple Buell. History will reflect positively on the decision by the WRHA to save Fruitdale School from the irreversible swing of the wrecking ball, and Colorado Preservation stands ready to provide the technical preservation assistance and support needed to make this project work."

The WRHA, with CPI's assistance, will be considering the submission of the Fruitdale School for National Register of Historic Places designation. Additionally, CPI will be conducting a structural assessment of the building as well as providing guidance to the WRHA on available grant funding opportunities.

"The Wheat Ridge Housing Authority was pleased to be an active partner in saving Fruitdale School from demolition. We look forward to finding out what Colorado Preservation Inc. comes up with as they do a study on possible future uses for a building that has played such an integral role in the education of many generations in our community," added Cheryl Brungardt, Chair of the WRHA.

Steve Bell, Chief Operating Officer for Jeffco Schools stated, "Jeffco Schools is pleased that we were able to find a mutually beneficial solution for the Wheat Ridge community, the District, and the City."

Questions about the Fruitdale School acquisition can be directed to Ken Johnstone, Director of Community Development at 303-235-2844, email: kjohnstone@ci.wheatridge.co or Sally Payne, Senior Planner at 303-235-2852, email: spayne@ci.wheatridge.co.us.

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