

NEWS

Greater New Haven Clergy Association

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Clergy Group Applaud Local Alderwomen and Continue Pressing for Community Benefits Agreement with Achievement First

The Greater New Haven Clergy Association calls for a fair and transparent process surrounding the purchase and development of the Martin Luther King School site on Dixwell Avenue. The following is a statement from the association in response to the New Haven Board of Alderman sending the proposed sale back to the Community Development Committee for additional discussion.

The Greater New Haven Clergy Association would like to applaud Alderwomen Brenda Foskey-Cyrus (D-21) and Delphine Clyburn (D-20) for leading the Board of Aldermen to opening the Martin Luther King School sale to more transparency. Sending the proposed sales agreement back to the Community Development Committee for additional discussion will eventually lead to a better Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) that will benefit all parties involved; the neighbors in that community, the city administration, Achievement First, and most of all, the students who will attend that institution.

As we have stated throughout this process, we do not oppose the development and construction of a new school at the current MLK site, or even the purchase of a public school by the private school company Achievement First. We understand that the city will get an infusion of cash to lower its growing budget deficit, and that the school will get an opportunity to grow its ever expanding fledgling high school, and we have no intention of interfering with those goals.

Our goal was and still is to make sure that the communities of Dixwell and Newhallville, to which some of us belong, and where many of our congregates reside, were represented in this process. Our questions remain the same, who are at the table and what is being discussed?

The Greater New Haven Clergy Association, as we outlined in our previous press statement, supports the Alderwomen's call for guaranteed spots at the new school for neighborhood kids, guaranteed jobs for neighborhood adults (as well as monitoring by neighborhood representatives), and answers as to why the proposed sale price is based on a lower value from an Achievement First appraisal, rather than a higher value from a city appraisal.

Since the school will be serving a much different population (high school as opposed to elementary school), as well as a much larger constituency, we would like to see several other neighborhood

benefits added to the CBA, including:

1. as a result of the request for reduced parking, Achievement First would agree to pay for permit parking for the next 30 years for all residents on streets bordering the school;
2. allow use of the school parking facilities on evening and weekends for community groups and businesses in the area;
3. stylish and neighborhood friendly garbage receptacles on the site;
4. guarantees that lighting as a result of the size and placement of the school will not interfere with the peace and tranquility of the neighbors;
5. guarantees that school activities, particularly afterschool, will be scheduled, monitored and supervised as to not interfere with the peace and tranquility of the neighbors;
6. all immediate properties be offered privacy fences;
7. a written plan as to how the use of the proposed sports field and community room is managed.

Our intention from the beginning has been to see a fair, transparent and open process, so that when this school is built everyone is content that they have had a say in this development, including the neighbors in this community. To make sure that this process is indeed transparent, we continue in our insistence that there should be a CBA team that would include local residents and business owners as members, and a convening of at least two community meetings to inform locals on the project as well as to ensure community input and approval. These steps should occur before the Board of Aldermen approves the sale of the property, not as an afterthought.

Again we applaud our two alderwomen for their persistent efforts to ensure that the local community is not forgotten during this development process.

Rev. James W. Newman III is the President of the Greater New Haven Clergy Association, and is the pastor of New Freedom Missionary Baptist Church on Starr Street bordering the Dixwell and Newhallville neighborhoods.