

Nathan Clifford Residences

180 Falmouth Street, Portland



Significance

Nathan Clifford Elementary School is a three-story brick building in the Oakdale neighborhood. Designed by John Calvin Stevens and constructed in 1907-1909, the school was named for U.S. Supreme Court Justice and Maine resident Nathan Clifford. With 16 classrooms, a gymnasium, and 500-seat auditorium, it was considered a model for schools in the area. Two Works Progress Administration murals by artist Ralph Frizzell, now at the Ocean Avenue School, flanked the auditorium stage. The school is also significant for enacting a program for visually impaired students in 1932, the only program of its kind in the state. The school closed in 2011, due to insufficient space and inability to meet modern education needs.

Project Scope

The City of Portland appointed a taskforce to determine preferred uses for the property and to solicit development proposals. The school was listed on the National Register, insuring that the project would qualify for historic tax credits. Developers Collaborative purchased the school for \$1, with the promise that 14,000 square feet of the land would become a public park and playground.

Developers Collaborative converted the school into 22 market-rate residential units. Renovations included asbestos remediation, masonry and water damage repairs, new windows, energy efficient natural gas heating, and accommodations for accessibility. A blackboard remains in each of the apartments, and built-in closets, wood flooring, high ceilings, and large windows have been preserved.

Recognition

The project is an excellent example of local government working closely with a neighborhood and developer to determine the best use for a beloved building that keeps it connected to the community. The City of Portland and Developers Collaborative made a concerted effort to ensure the building's preservation. Recognition is also deserved for retaining the interior historic features alongside modern, energy efficient amenities.