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Why this developer is investing \$22 million in Schenectady's Hamilton Hill

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Two former schools in Schenectady's Hamilton Hill are the focal point of a \$22 million affordable housing investment by [The Community Builders Inc.](#)

Both of the old schools are on Craig Street in the neighborhood, which has struggled for many years with street crime, boarded-up buildings, substandard apartments, and [high poverty and teen pregnancy rates](#).

Executives at The Community Builders, a Boston nonprofit real estate developer with an office in Albany, wanted to invest in Hamilton Hill for some time and saw an opportunity at the former St. Columba Catholic School and Horace Mann School.



DONNA ABBOTT-VLAHOS

"Our mission is to build and sustain communities," said [Jennica Petrik-Huff](#), project manager. "This is very much mission driven."

St. Columba was built by the Catholic diocese in 1916 to compete with Horace Mann, a public school just two blocks away. In those days, Hamilton Hill was a growing neighborhood with many European immigrants drawn to the plentiful factory jobs in Schenectady.

The city fell on hard times after General Electric Co.'s workforce plummeted in the decades after World War II, down from a high of 39,000 in 1942, according to the Schenectady County Historical Society.

Hamilton Hill, whose demographics had gradually changed from middle-income white to low-income black, suffered greatly.

The building at 400 Craig St. eventually became home to the Boys and Girls Clubs after St. Columba closed. The former Horace Mann School at 602 Craig St. became a community health center. Both organizations are now at new locations.

The Community Builders bought the former schools and six abandoned houses nearby — five on Stanley Street, one on Emmett Street. The houses on Stanley Street were featured [last fall](#) in [Breathing Lights](#), an art installation that [lit up the windows of hundreds of vacant buildings](#) in Schenectady, Albany and Troy to draw attention to blight.

Three of the houses will be renovated into apartments; three others have been demolished and replaced with apartments. Those 20 units will be in addition to the 13 apartments at St. Columba and 25 apartments for senior citizens at Horace Mann. The rents will be no more than 30 percent of the tenant's income. The Community Builders is using federal historic and low-income tax credits to offset the investment.

U.W. Marx is the general contractor.

Other new projects in Hamilton Hill include a \$14 million, 50-unit apartment complex at 770-780 Albany St., a partnership between Rochester-based DePaul Properties, the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal, and the state Office of Mental Health.

Click on the slideshow to learn more about the apartments being developed by The Community Builders.

Michael DeMasi
Reporter

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