



DIOCESE OF CHARLOTTE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Diocese of Charlotte to donate Dunbar School to Preservation North Carolina in continued partnership for redevelopment, community benefit

DAVIDSON COUNTY (June 30, 2023) – Preservation North Carolina, in partnership with the Catholic Diocese of Charlotte, is pleased to announce the diocese’s donation of the historic Dunbar School in Lexington to the nonprofit organization, to help ensure the landmark is thoughtfully renovated and preserved for generations.

The diocese acquired the site in 2009 with hopes of working with developers to convert the school into affordable housing for seniors. Developers, however, have been unable to secure federal tax credits necessary to make the project feasible.

Preservation North Carolina, which promotes and protects the buildings and landscapes of the state’s diverse heritage, will assume ownership of the 10-acre Dunbar school tract, with plans of tapping into its broad network of development partners and additional funding sources including federal preservation resources. The property transfer is expected to be completed in July.

“We’re grateful for the diocese’s generosity and continued commitment to preservation, and we’re thrilled to have a new opportunity for the renovation of the Dunbar School for the benefit of the community,” said Cathleen Turner, Preservation North Carolina’s Piedmont regional director. “We’re already talking with parties who have the interest and know-how to renovate historic buildings. We’ll be working as quickly as possible to create an achievable development plan that is sensitive and appropriate.”

Built in 1951, the Dunbar School is named for African American poet and writer Paul Laurence Dunbar and served Black students before the schools were integrated. Its solid structure reflects an “interesting moment in the struggle to integrate schools,” said Preservation North Carolina President Myrick Howard.

“The Dunbar School was built when North Carolina was investing more heavily in African American schools with the hope of making them ‘equal,’” Howard said, “but Civil Rights cases were already raising questions about the future of the Jim Crow ‘separate but equal’ policy – which was ultimately struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954.”

Designed by the nationally renowned Lockwood Greene engineering company, Dunbar underwent additions in 1957 and 1962, and finally in 1973 when an octagonal-shaped media center and cafeteria were added, creating a spacious, nearly enclosed outdoor courtyard. The school contains approximately 30 classrooms, a library, auditorium with capacity for more than 500 people, large cafeteria and gymnasium.

The site includes two tennis courts, a playground and a softball field, which have been operated as a park by the city of Lexington for the past decade – an arrangement that will continue.

“This site is a unique asset with tons of potential for the community, so we’re looking forward to see what Preservation North Carolina can achieve,” said Anthony Morlando, director of properties and real estate for the diocese. “We believe they have access to a broader array of resources that will be critical to development of the site, and we’re glad to play a small part of preserving the history and heritage of Dunbar School.”

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About the Catholic Diocese of Charlotte

The Diocese of Charlotte encompasses 92 parishes and 20 schools across the western half of North Carolina, with a growing Catholic population of more than 500,000.

About Preservation North Carolina

Founded in 1939, Preservation North Carolina is the state’s only private nonprofit statewide historic preservation organization. Its mission is to protect and promote buildings, landscapes and sites important to the diverse people of North Carolina. Through its award-winning Endangered Properties Program, Preservation North Carolina acquires endangered historic properties and then finds purchasers to rehabilitate them. PNC has protected nearly 900 historic properties statewide.