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## Randolph transforms former school into affordable, rural housing *Project will add 31 units in Columbia County*

**MADISON, WI. JULY 3, 2025**– The once-silent hallways of a historic school are echoing with new life in Randolph. There are plans to transform the former elementary and middle school, which has been largely vacant for over eight years, into a 31-unit apartment complex—offering affordable housing and community growth to the rural community.

It's a move that's creating a buzz in the community of 1,800 in Columbia County.

"There is a lot of excitement in Randolph with the school renovation," said Village Trustee Nicholas Weinberger. "We often hear comments from people saying they would love to move here, but they just can't find housing. That's coming from young families, retirees — really people at all stages of life."

Located at 256 N. High St, the development will be home to 28 apartments, 26 of which will be offered at less than the market rate, and three condominium units.

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is assisting the project with a \$250,000 Idle Sites Redevelopment (ISR) grant, which helps communities repurpose vacant or unused properties to spur economic activity and address local needs.

"Repurposing unused buildings is one of the most powerful ways to create economic momentum and growth in rural communities," said Missy Hughes, secretary and CEO of WEDC, the state's lead economic development agency. "Projects like this one not only support Randolph residents directly, but also support local businesses, create jobs, and address the growing demand for quality housing across rural Wisconsin. WEDC is pleased to be part of creative solutions like this that strengthen communities and drive long-term economic growth in every corner of our state."

Communities throughout the state are exploring innovative solutions to meet local housing needs, such as turning former schools and other buildings into apartments and condos. According to Everett Butzine, interim president and CEO of the Madison Region Economic Partnership (MadREP), Wisconsin's housing supply isn't keeping pace with demand, which drives up housing prices and limits options for working families.

"The housing market moves quickly so bringing affordable housing to Wisconsin is already a huge accomplishment," Butzine said. "Adding taxable value to the community is also a huge benefit, ensuring that rural communities can fund public services like utilities, road improvements, and other upgrades."

Once completed, the building will add approximately \$2.25 million of new assessed value to the village's revenue. The project also has the potential to create 31 additional customers for

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their sewer and water utility system, which will help with maintaining lower rates for residents, according to village officials.

With recent infrastructure upgrades and two additional housing projects on the horizon, the school renovation project is a key addition to Randolph's growing community. The project complements these efforts by providing much needed life cycle housing—a model that provides living options for all people throughout different phases of life from entry-level apartments for young families to more manageable spaces for downsizing seniors.

Gustave Wasilevich, the developer at Obsidian Estates spearheading the project, saw potential in the old building. The process of adapting the space was not without challenges, but he emphasizes the importance of preservation, energy efficiency and long-term community value.

"Providing housing in smaller communities helps address shortages and supports local growth," Wasilevich said. "Apartment housing like this offers flexible living options for a range of individuals and families. It's practical, accessible, and it revitalizes a part of the community that had been overlooked."

The apartment complex is expected to be completed by July of 2026.

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