

Former Palmer School in NoLibs gets new owner

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City School, a private, independent school based in Philadelphia, has paid \$9.75 million to buy the former Palmer School in Northern Liberties to accommodate its expanding enrollment and breathe new life into a building that once housed a now defunct charter school.

The 60,800-square-foot building was shuttered in 2014 when the Walter D. Palmer Leadership Partners Charter School struggled financially and faced questions over its academic achievements. Two years after it closed, the property was scooped up for \$6 million by American Investment Partners, a Philadelphia real estate firm that had considered a range of development options for the 1.5-acre site at 910-48 N. 6th St. Ideas ranged from razing the structure and constructing a new mixed-use project to re-using the building.

“We were looking at everything,” said Andrew Yaffe of American Investment. “This turned out to be a good offer and the right timing.”

The property is in a neighborhood that has seen a tremendous amount of residential development activity along with a smattering of restaurants and retailers moving in as well. As a result of all of the development, sites, particularly ones in prime locations, are scarce and highly sought after.

“We had a lot of interest from developers and schools,” said [Ken Mallin](#) and [Veronica Blum](#) of MPN Realty, who arranged the transaction. “We had a number of offers of which three were very strong and they chose City School because of the caliber of the buyer.”

Built in 2006, the main building has two dozen classrooms, a gym, breakout rooms, and a cafeteria with a full-service kitchen. An adjacent modular building has additional classroom space and offices. It’s also near mass transit and not far from major arteries. For City School, it was meant to be.

“It’s something we have been praying for for a long time,” said [Jake Becker](#), who serves as head of the school. “We are going to be part of the local neighborhood and this is a location that people from all over the city can get to. We were looking for something centrally located.”

City School, set to celebrate its 40th anniversary next year, was formed from the merging of three independent, religious-based schools. Its roots go back to the founding in 1978 of Spruce Hill Christian School. Six years ago, it had 270 students enrolled and now it has 370 students.

The school has four campuses in Philadelphia. City School owns its elementary campuses at Spruce Hill at 4115 Baltimore Ave. and in Fairmount at 860 N. 24th St. and those facilities will remain in operation. It currently rents space at 4501 Walnut St., where it has a middle school, and 315 S. 17th St., which serves as its high school, and plans entail moving out of those two locations to consolidate into the Northern Liberties building. At its new location, it expects to start with about 160 students in grades six through 12 and anticipates doubling that over time.

Though the Northern Liberties building has not been in use for a few years, it’s in good condition and, but for getting furniture, installing technology and making some slight configurations, the City School expects to open its doors there next fall.



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City School bought the former Walter Palmer School in Northern Liberties.

Natalie Kostelni
Reporter
Philadelphia Business Journal

