

Gov. Walker: Attends Welford Sanders Lofts Groundbreaking

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Contact: Tom Evenson, [\(608\) 266-2839](tel:(608)266-2839)

MILWAUKEE - Governor Scott Walker took part in a groundbreaking and ribbon cutting ceremony today at the Welford Sanders Historic Lofts, a \$21 million renovation of an underutilized historic industrial building on North 4th Street in Milwaukee.

“This project demonstrates the important role public-private ventures play in our state’s economic development,” said Governor Walker. “It’s inspiring to see the positive repurposing of a historic building into an economic generator and job generator for the Milwaukee neighborhood.”

At the event with community leaders and industry partners, Governor Walker announced the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) has awarded a \$250,000 Community Development Investment Grant to Milwaukee County for the project - the final piece of financing needed for the redevelopment to move forward. WEDC has also awarded the project with nearly \$4 million in historic preservation tax credits, and the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) has allocated \$654,721 in low-income tax credits and \$15.3 million in loans.

The Welford Sanders Historic Lofts is a commercial-residential development located in the former Nunn Bush shoe factory, a 101-year-old building that was underutilized and deteriorating. The project is named in memory of former Martin Luther King Drive Economic Development Corporation (MLKEDC) Executive Director Welford Sanders, who passed away unexpectedly in May of 2015.

“Under the visionary leadership of Welford Sanders, MLKEDC has been transforming the Harambee neighborhood for more than 20 years,” said Ben Johnson, President of the MLKEDC Board. “This project is the most significant and prominent one we have ever undertaken and it’s appropriate to honor Welford’s legacy by naming the project after him. We are very grateful to our investors and partners who stood by us and supported our efforts throughout these many years.”

The project is a joint venture between MLKEDC and Wisconsin Redevelopment LLC. It includes renovation of about 38,000 square feet of office space (formerly the Milwaukee Enterprise Center) and the creation of 59 new housing units, creating a “walk-to-work” environment.

The current phase of renovation and construction on the building started in February and will be complete in March 2018.

The development is expected to create an average of 70 full-time construction jobs during the one-year construction period, and will also create and/or support permanent jobs in the area of Milwaukee’s greatest need. Conveniently situated on a city bus route, the facility has office and light manufacturing space that has the potential to provide underemployed or unemployed individuals with permanent jobs. An “employment partnership” has been developed with the other agencies currently located in the building to help residents overcome barriers to employment. Those partners include Milwaukee Job Works, the Alma Center, and Project Return. The remaining commercial office rentals are priced below market to further enhance needed services to area residents.

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