



**Shaun A. Suhoski**, *Town Manager*  
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Citizens' Housing and Planning Association  
18 Tremont Street, Suite 401  
Boston, MA 02108

**RE: Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On Tuesday night NewVue Communities will present a site in Athol for consideration of reuse planning by a crop of talented students. Unfortunately, I am not able to attend, but, I felt it important to share why this project is so important to the community.

Athol is a hardscrabble town of 11,500 residents that forged its "Tool Town" moniker during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when hulking mills along the Millers River hummed with activity. At one time 1,400 blue collar laborers made precision tools and dies in the heart of downtown until the Union Twist Drill Co. closed in the late 1980s displacing 800 workers.

The town struggled mightily in the wake of the closure and it took an entire generation to regain an economic foothold. Athol and the region are typically the first to enter into a recession and the last to recover due to lack of educational attainment, poor transportation infrastructure and a myriad of social issues associated with economic disadvantage.

Against that gloomy backdrop, over the past decade the Town has reinvested in itself and its citizenry by constructing a police station, completing a major expansion of the library, and building a state-of-the-art elementary school in 2016 to replace obsolete neighborhood schools. Concurrently, RMD / Demoulas anchored and developed a new commercial center providing services and jobs. But, these noteworthy achievements come with a cost as the growing economy impacts the cost and availability of good housing.

The new school was needed, but, the vacant remains serve only as gaping reminders of the past. If selected, NewVue and the Town will stand as partners in the effort to recast this fallow neighborhood block into a thoughtful and beneficial project for the future. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Shaun A. Suhoski  
Town Manager

cc: NewVue Communities