

Bike entrepreneur, partners propose Dorchester bike shop/cafe

[Sandra Larson](#) | 1/7/2015, 10:44 a.m.



Bowdoin Bike School owner Noah Hicks. In partnership with Historic Boston Incorporated and The American City Corporation, Hicks hopes to create a bike shop and cafe in the former comfort station. Photo courtesy of Bowdoin Bike School

A long-abandoned former public bath house near Uphams Corner available for redevelopment has sparked the interest of four proposers, among them Dorchester native and self-styled bicycle repair entrepreneur Noah Hicks.

For the past six years, Hicks, 28, has been buying, restoring and selling bicycles in his home neighborhood of Bowdoin-Geneva. What started as a hobby became a job at Ashmont Cycles and then his own Bowdoin Bike School, a bicycle repair and teaching center he set up in an open-air space at the Bowdoin-Geneva Community Hub. At Bowdoin Bike School, he engaged local youth in mastering bicycle mechanics and bicycling safety.

Hicks has dreamt for some time of a more permanent (and warmer) shop combined with a cafe. Last May, he launched a fundraising effort on Indiegogo.com to help fund his bicycle repair operations and some improvements to his makeshift shed — with a longer-term goal to open a “brick-and-mortar” bike shop and cafe by Spring 2015. The crowd-funding project ended in July, having brought in more than \$7,000.



Banner photo

This former public bath house at 611 Columbia Rd., long-shuttered and soon to be redeveloped, was designed by architect William Besarick and is an example of mission-style architecture.

Now, in partnership with Historic Boston Incorporated and The American City Coalition, Hicks is proposing to redevelop the decrepit, city-owned bath house — known as a comfort station — as “Bike Kitchen,” a bicycle retail and repair shop and cafe under one roof.

“This was a good opportunity to look for a larger place to continue to reach people in the community and get more bikes, fix more bikes and pay more young people,” Hicks told the Banner. “The point is not to just open up a business, but a business that benefits the community. I want to continue doing this kind of work in a way that’s sustainable and provides jobs.”

Historic Boston Incorporated would take on most of the funding, design and renovation work for the estimated \$1.1 million project, while Hicks, operating the Bike Kitchen shop and cafe, would be the refurbished building’s tenant.

“HBI’s mission is to redevelop significant historical buildings, especially in ways that can catalyze neighborhood vitality,” said Jeffrey Morgan, the organization’s director of real estate development.

One of HBI’s recent projects was redevelopment of the Eustis Street Fire House in Roxbury, where interpretive panels now portray the site’s history.

The comfort station, closed since 1977, sits adjacent to the historic Dorchester North Burying Ground, which is listed in the State and National Register of Historic Places. Renovations will be reviewed by the Boston Landmarks Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission, according to the Bike Kitchen proposal.

The one-story stucco and tile building, designed by architect William Besarick, is a good example of mission-style architecture, Morgan said. The proposed Bike Kitchen project would highlight the building’s transportation-related history as a rest stop along what was once a bustling trolley line.

“Comfort stations were often placed along important transportation corridors,” Morgan said. “This was a streetcar corridor, with a lot of people commuting. It’s similar to a rest area along the highway.”

The building consists mainly of toilet and shower stalls on the street level, and a basement.

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If this former public restroom is reincarnated as a bicycle shop and cafe, the site would be a respite once again, this time for drivers, Fairmount Line riders and bicycle commuters. Hicks noted that Columbia Road is a busy thoroughfare for bicyclists heading downtown from Milton and other points south. He envisions having a go-to shop open early in the morning “where you can pick up a bicycle inner tube and also a coffee.”

Hicks predicts the shop would serve not only early-morning bicycle commuters, but entrepreneurs and people working in other Uphams Corner small businesses who right now have few options for sitting down in a nice space for a coffee or lunch break.

The third partner on the Bike Kitchen team, The American City Corporation, is a Dorchester-based nonprofit foundation that facilitates partnerships to revitalize neighborhoods. If the Bike Kitchen proposal is the one selected by the Department of Neighborhood Development after initial review and a public comment period, TACC will provide coordination and technical assistance to the project, according to Zachary Nieder, a research fellow at TACC.

“We work to ensure that all residents of Boston can benefit from economic opportunities,” Nieder said. “We think of [Bike Kitchen] as a creative, sustainable space with a community focus. We think it fits nicely within the greater Uphams Corner neighborhood.”

Sheila Dillon, director of the city’s Department of Neighborhood Development, said she was pleased to receive four responses to the Request for Proposals put out last fall.

“We’ve put it out in the past and didn’t receive any interest,” she said, referring to an earlier attempt to find a developer in 2010. “It demonstrates that people have confidence in the neighborhood.”

Bike Kitchen and the other three proposals — for a neighborhood bistro, a day care center and a grocery store/office space — are still under review, Dillon said. Those proposers whose submissions meet minimum requirements will have a chance to explain their ideas to the public at a developers’ presentation session Jan. 26 at the Strand Theater. Interested residents will be able to ask questions at that session or submit written comments to the DND for a period of time afterward.

For more information and updates on the development opportunity, see <http://courbanize.com/dnd-uphams-corner-comfort-station/>.



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