

# BACKUS Community Center

Volume 15, Issue 3

March 2023

## Alexander Baker Housing Project.

Dedicated to bring affordable housing and preserving history in our area.

### The Vision

The historic Alexander Baker (AB) School will see a new life as affordable housing for International Falls residents. Organizations including Citizens for Backus/AB, KOOTASCA Community Action and Trellis Co. (formerly known as Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDC) have partnered to preserve and develop the historic building into an affordable 27-unit multi-family apartments.

Built in 1914, AB was the first school of modern construction built in the region. Created to meet the needs of booming growth in International Falls, the school was a source of significant public pride and investment. Surely well remembered by its former students, this is still evident today in the building's fine craftsmanship, beautiful wrought iron stairway galleries, spacious terrazzo hallways, and many architectural touches, which will soon be restored and preserved.



### Meet the AB Housing Team!

#### Who are the Developers and Future Owners?

1. KOOTASCA Community Action
2. Trellis - Formerly known as Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDC)

**Architect**  
UrbanWorks Architecture

**General Contractor**  
Frerichs Construction



In 2017, KOOTASCA and Citizens for Backus/AB launched efforts to adaptively reuse the building for affordable housing. These efforts are now a cornerstone of KOOTASCA's long-standing work to fill the gap in development capacity for Minnesota's Northland that has left so many communities in dire need of housing of all kinds.

Why does International Falls need new multi-family housing? As a rural border community, International Falls has been hard hit by our Nation's long ongoing housing crisis. Since the United States Tax Reform Act of 1987, there has not been a single new market rate or affordable general-occupancy apartment building built in Koochiching County.

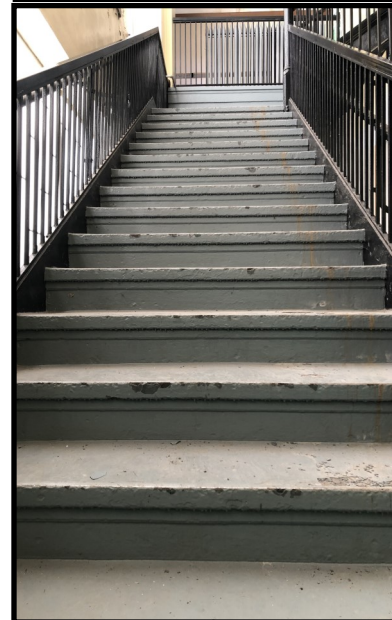
This means, over the last 35 years, the stock of rental housing added to the International Falls community, (approximately 300 units) has come overwhelmingly from the loss of single-family homes from occupant ownership to landlord ownership. In a healthier market, many of those homes would have been purchased by working families and new apartments built to meet rental demand.

## From the Directors Desk

This issue of the Backus newsletter is dedicated to sharing information about the **Alexander Baker Housing Project**. Our goal is to provide information that will help you have a better understanding of:

- Who is buying the Alexander Baker School?
- Who is the general contractor?
- How many apartments will there be?
- What is affordable housing?
- What will happen to the Backus building?
- When will apartments be ready to rent?
- How can I get my name on a list to possibly move in?

We hope you find this issue informative and helpful!



### Fast Facts:

- 27 units of Adaptive Reuse in the historic Alexander Baker School on 1.2 acres
- 14 two-bedroom units
- 6 one-bedroom units
- 4 three-bedroom units
- 3 four-bedroom units
- 10 subsidized units with rental assistance and Permanent Supportive Housing for persons with disabilities and high priority homeless
- Location: 901 3rd St. International Falls, MN 56649
- Project Cost: \$12.9 million Funding Sources: Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, State and Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, Energy Rebates, Sales tax rebates
- Income Eligibility: 60% and 30% of Area Median Income (For Example: 3 bedroom unit, \$45,120 – \$62,160 annual income)



**Watch KCC-TV for updates once the sale is complete and construction begins!**

### VOLUNTEER



Would you like to become a Backus Volunteer?

**We have many opportunities!**

Usher  
Food and beverage service  
Event set-up  
Event take-down  
Poster distribution  
Office support

Please reach out to Backus office if you are interesting in volunteering with us.  
218-285-7225

### NEWSLETTER

**Do you enjoy receiving the Backus newsletter?**

**We can now send your newsletter digitally!**

**Please call the Backus office at (218)285-7225**

**to let us know if you would prefer your newsletter via print or email.**

**Contact Backus:**

**E-mail:** backusoffice@backusab.org

**Call:** 218-285-7225

**Write:** 900 5th St., Int'l Falls MN 56649

### BACKUS STAFF

Lois Lundin,  
Executive Director

Hoa Sobczynski,  
Business Manager

Alyssa Crawford,  
Office Assistant

Darcy Sullivan,  
KCC-TV Director

## What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing is housing that a family can pay for and have money left over for other necessities like food, transportation, and health care. What's considered "affordable" depends on a household's income. The rent or home price that is affordable may vary from one household to the next, but the need for housing that is affordable is shared by everyone. Housing is considered affordable when it costs 30% or less of a household's income.



## How to Apply

- KOOTASCA will announce when they start taking applications
- Income Eligibility is 30-60% of the area median income.
- Please watch the newspaper and other communications for updates and information from KOOTASCA Community Action.



## What will happen to the Backus building?

Backus will continue to be your Community Center, bringing all generations together to celebrate arts, culture, recreation, wellness, and life-long learning.



## Keeping History in the Building

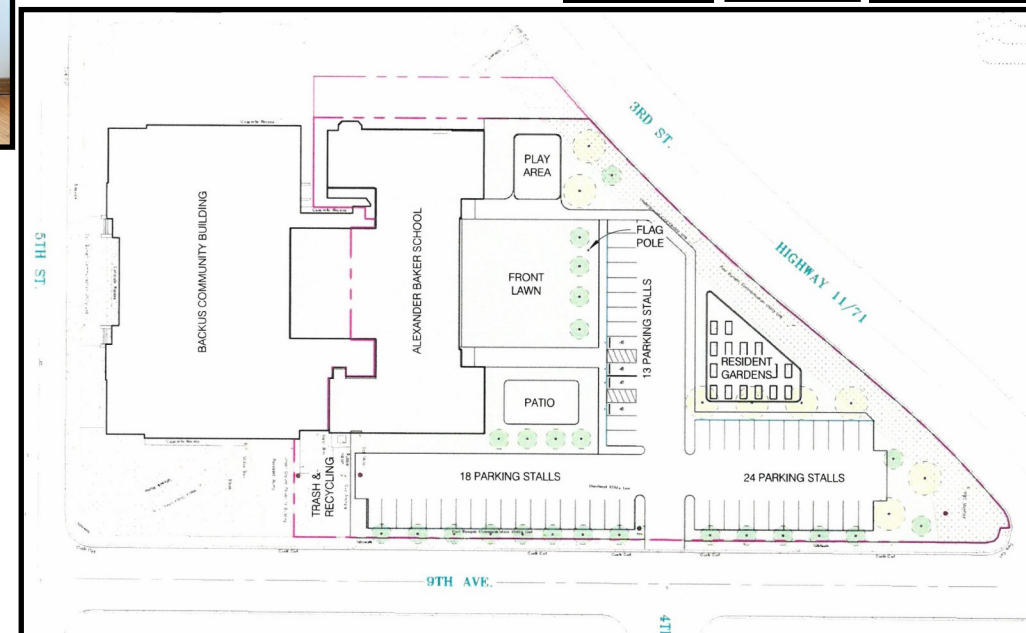
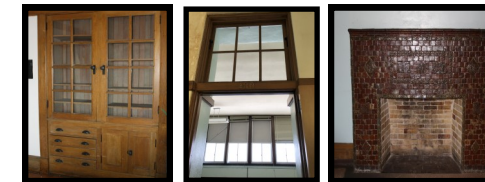
MN State Historic Preservation Office and The National Park Service are working along side the team to ensure the historic character of the Alexander Baker building will stay in tact.



## 27 Housing Units

- 14 two bedroom units
- 6 one bedroom units
- 4 three bedroom units
- 3 four bedroom units
- 10 of these units will be subsidized units with rental assistance and permanent supportive housing for persons with disabilities and high priority homeless.
- Private off street parking for tenants.
- Green space, garden space, and play area.

Please come to Backus to see the AB floorplans!





900 Fifth Street  
International Falls MN 56649  
(218) 285-7225  
www.backusab.org

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*“Historic Backus Community Center, the heart of International Falls, where all generations celebrate arts, culture, recreation, wellness, and life-long learning.”*

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*The next board meetings are April 13 and May 11 at 5:00 PM in room 101/102.*

BACKUS VALUES YOUR INPUT!  
Do you have comments, questions,  
suggestions, or concerns  
regarding Backus?  
Please contact the Backus Board at  
[backusboard@backusab.org](mailto:backusboard@backusab.org)

**COMING SOON TO BACKUS**

**Easter Passion Play/  
Choir**  
7:00 PM, April 5



**Ruby's Pantry**  
5:00-6:30 PM, Monday, April 10

**Community Café**  
5:00-6:00 PM, Tuesdays and Thursdays