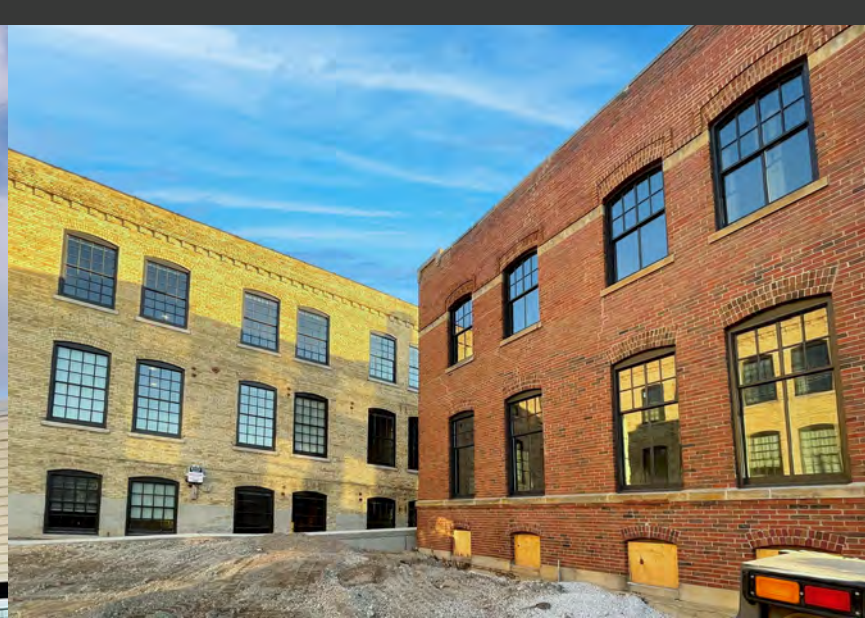


CREATING RAYS OF HOPE THROUGH AFFORDABLE HOUSING CASE STUDY

COMMUNITY WITHIN THE CORRIDOR

Milwaukee, WI





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Que El-Amin, Principal, Scott Crawford Inc.

+ PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Architect
Continuum Architects + Planners

Co-Developers
Scott Crawford Inc.
Roers Companies

Dealer/Installer
B&D Contractors

Construction Manager
Greenfire Management Services LLC

Product
SR6700 Steel Replica and 1200H Offset Fixed Series Windows

+ CHALLENGE

Help the developers obtain historic tax credits by recapturing the original intent of the windows and delivering thermal performance, while staying within the budget of an affordable housing project.

+ CREATING RAYS OF HOPE THROUGH AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In 1960, the highest standard of living for African Americans in the United States was enjoyed by those living in the neighborhoods surrounding Milwaukee’s 30th Street Corridor. Industry flourished and, even in 1970, a higher percentage of Blacks worked in industrial jobs there than in Detroit. “It was the heartbeat of the city,” says Que El-Amin, principal of Scott Crawford Inc., a Milwaukee area real estate development firm.

The next two decades were marked by dramatic change. The city lost 14,000 industrial jobs. Meanwhile, Milwaukee’s suburban municipalities gained more than 100,000. Property values fell and crime increased.

Even today, the neighborhood still feels the impact. But hope is on the rise, and Graham Architectural Products is playing a small, but significant role in the transformation of the Corridor.

Creating a Corridor of Possibility

For over a century, the Briggs & Stratton Industrial Campus was center stage in the area’s rise and fall. Located in the Industrial Corridor in northwest Milwaukee, the campus covered more than 8 acres spread over two city blocks. Its six buildings were home to a range of manufacturers, from Westinghouse Lamp Co. and Reliance Boiler Works to Harley-Davidson. Over the decades, Briggs & Stratton came to own and occupy all the buildings. But by 1987, the campus was abandoned.

While many developers looked at the sprawling property, “Developing something that is befitting the neighborhood and also attractive for developers proved to be difficult,” says Lybra Loest, marketing director for Continuum Architects + Planners.

Enter El-Amin and a small group of community activists. They had a vision for the campus and a tenacious faith in their ability to bring it to life. The result of that faith, a \$66 million redevelopment project called Community Within the Corridor, held its official groundbreaking ceremony June 18, 2021.

Completed in late summer 2022, the new campus features 197 affordable housing units, as well as 40,000 square feet of commercial and common recreation space, including a grocery and laundromat, daycare and after-school programs, an entrepreneurship center, a food hall, and a creative center featuring podcast rooms and art, dance and recording studios. The objective, El-Amin says, is to give children, families and the community, “a leg up.”

A Little Serendipity Goes a Long Way

Continuum had attempted to partner with Scott Crawford Inc. on a previous project but was not selected due to what El-Amin calls “a technicality.” Falamak Nourzad, Continuum’s co-founder and principal, followed up by inviting El-Amin to lunch to discuss the missed opportunity.

They discovered a shared passion for historic buildings and affordable housing. And El-Amin realized he lived in a project from the Continuum portfolio. A bond formed. Nourzad agreed to perform some preliminary planning studies on the Briggs & Stratton property to see if the historical warehouse/manufacturing style buildings could be converted into residential housing units that would be habitable and profitable as a development property. She also connected El-Amin with Brian Roers, co-owner of Roers Companies, which would eventually become the project’s co-developer.

El-Amin says, “Hats off to Falamak, because she believed in the project from day one. It wouldn’t have got done without her.”

Graham, which had provided windows for Continuum projects in the past, was brought in, too. Graham ended up providing 1,200 windows, including its SR6700 and 1200H offset fixed series. Graham rep Tim Finley says, “With our SR6700, we were able to bring a historic window to match the historic fabric of a building from years ago at an affordable price.”

El-Amin goes further, saying, “Graham has been a tremendous, tremendous partner. Having them go and really count all of the windows – measure them so we can get an accurate count on our budget to submit – was something that not everyone wanted to do. Graham’s willingness to ... go above and beyond in making sure that we had proper windows and accurate pricing helped make the project go forward.”

A Blueprint for Making Hope Go Viral

As Finley says, “Community Within the Corridor is a great project and for all the right reasons. It’s the historic preservation of a historic building – a building no one’s invested in for many, many years. And to repurpose a structure that otherwise would sit vacant and turn it into useable, affordable housing is even better.”

Opportunities for similar projects are in metropolitan areas throughout the U.S. In fact, a 2018 study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition found there wasn’t a single county in the nation where a renter working 40 hours a week and earning minimum wage could afford a typical two-bedroom apartment. And that was before the pandemic.

But this project is unique. The drive came from within the community. El-Amin – along with Mikal Wesley and Rayhainio Boynes – pursued it for years before acquiring the funding. “There were times we wanted to not continue on,” says El-Amin, “but we held each other responsible at different times and kept each other focused on the project.”

Still, El-Amin thinks it can be a model for other communities. “We think and hope that people will learn from this and improve upon what we’ve done.”

And while it hasn’t been easy, it promises to be worth the effort. As Roers’ Director of Development Shane LaFave told OnMilwaukee.com, “There’s a reason it took four years to bring this project from conception to closing. We brought together nine sources of financing to fund the \$67 million total project cost that it takes to renovate a 100-plus-year-old industrial facility into a multifamily community. All of those partnerships came together to create what will be an incredible asset for an underserved community for decades to come.”



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