

Property Sales Roundup: Early Ed Center Expands

by THOMAS BREEN | Sep 9, 2022 3:04 pm



[Commercial tenants at 881-883 Whalley \(pictured\) can stay put for the duration of their leases.](#)

A Fair Haven Heights-based early childhood education nonprofit continued its citywide expansion by purchasing two adjacent commercial buildings in Westville Village for \$1.995 million.

That was one of the latest local property transactions, as recorded on New Haven's online land records database. (See below for a full roundup of recent city property sales.)

On Aug. 31, the Friends Center for Children Inc. purchased the two-story, four-unit office building at 881 Whalley Ave. and the single-story, four-unit retail building at 883 Whalley Ave. from 881 Whalley LLC for \$1.995 million.

That two-building, 0.55-acre property last sold for \$343,688 in 2019. The city last appraised it as worth \$1,557,100.

The seller of the property is an affiliate of the local megalandlord Ocean Management, while the new owner is a Quaker-influenced early childhood education program that currently operates out of locations on East Grand Avenue and Blake Street.

This latest purchase comes less than a month after the Friends Center bought the now-closed former Ciné 4 movie theater property at 371 Middletown Ave. / 25 Flint St. for \$1.3 million—with plans to convert that 1.93-acre site into a bustling campus for affordable early childhood education. It also comes as the Friends Center plans to open yet another childcare center at the future Dixwell Plaza redevelopment to be built by ConnCORP.



The single-story retail building at 883 Whalley and the two-story office building at 881 Whalley, now both owned by the Friends Center for Children.

Friends Center for Children Executive Director Allyx Schiavone told the Independent Monday that her nonprofit purchased the Whalley Avenue property with the goal of expanding the childcare services it currently provides nearby at 495 Blake St.

“We really have a wonderful community over there, and we wanted to be able to provide families with care in that neighborhood,” she said. “We want to be able to expand, and we needed the space near there” to do just that.

She described the 881–883 Whalley Ave. purchase as “in line with our original plan, which is to provide as much early care education as we can to city residents at an affordable and high-quality level of care.”

The Friends Center currently provides full-day childcare services 50 weeks a year for a racially and economically diverse group of young children ages three months to 5 years old, as well as free housing for its teachers and sliding-scale tuition for participating families. Schiavone said that 44 percent of the center’s participating families make less than \$40,000 per year, while 89 percent receive subsidized support for tuition.

“Our mission statement is to create a community that is reflective of the community of New Haven. We look proportionately at income levels and access, and we intentionally create a community where people who would otherwise not have access to each other” can come together and learn in the same space side by side, she said.

Because early childhood education is not funded at the levels that it needs to be, Schiavone added, “a sliding scale tuition system where some are paying for the full cost of care and others are paying nothing allows us to pay a livable wage to the employees that dedicate their lives to the children and families in our care. We refuse to subsidize early care and education on the backs of the worker.”

She stressed how much of an affordability and access crisis there is in the world of early childhood education, and how the Friends Center aims to “disrupt the system” to ensure that families are adequately supported and educators are fairly compensated.



Friends Center’s Schiavone.



881 Whalley: Current dentist's office, future childcare site.

So. What exactly are the Friends Center's near-term and long-term plans for 881 and 883 Whalley?

Schiavone said that the back of of the office building at 881 Whalley is currently empty. Within the next year or two, depending on the site's zoning, the Friends Center plans to move its existing childcare operations on Blake Street over to that empty space on Whalley.

She said that move should allow the Friends Center to serve an additional 16 children on top of the 36 that it currently serves on Blake Street.

What will happen to the site's current commercial tenants—including orthodontist and dentist offices at 881 Whalley, and the Westville Emesa pizzeria and restaurant at 883 Whalley?

Schiavone said that the Friends Center intends to keep all of the property's existing commercial tenants in place through the end of their respective leases. Some of those leases run out in a year or two, while others extend five, even 10 years out.

Long term, she said, the Friends Center plans to convert both properties into early childhood education centers.

"Our work is to create models of learning communities that can show a different way for it to be done," Schiavone said. For example, the Friends Center hopes to one day provide "outdoor learning on a rooftop" at the newly acquired Whalley Avenue site, "creating an outdoor play space that is elevated from a city landscape, so that it's up higher from the ground level and creating sort of an oasis that a lot of city families and children just don't have access to."