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From left, Lucy Corchado, Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley, Lisa Alberghini, and Aaron Gornstein help cut the ribbon during the Sept. 27 dedication ceremony for the new affordable housing facility at 135 Lafayette Street. Wicked Local Photo/ Greg Phipps

Ceremony celebrates new housing facility, but need is still critical

By Greg Phipps
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There were many smiles on the faces of those in attendance, including residents and their families, at the dedication ceremony held Saturday, Sept. 27, for the new 135 Lafayette St. apartment complex in Salem.

But Lisa Alberghini, president of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, put the enormity of the housing situation in perspective during her

opening address.

"There were more than 1,050 applicants for these 51 apartments, so there is clearly a dramatic need for more affordable housing in Salem," she said. "Redeveloping the former St. Joseph's Parish campus in this way uses the property to continue the mission of the church, in a new form, for generations to come."

Those 1,000-plus applicants entered a lottery back in 2013 for the chance to secure one of the available units.

The new facility occupies the location once held by the St. Joseph's Catholic Church, which was there over 70 years before being demolished in 2013 to make way for the apartment building, part of the city's ongoing redevelopment plan.

Along with the 51 residential units, the new facility provides 4,000 square feet of commercial space. The building was completed in January, and

SEE HOUSING, A2

HOUSING

From Page A1

residents began moving in shortly after.

Several officials involved in the project spoke at the ceremony, including Mayor Kim Driscoll, Aaron Gornstein, undersecretary for Mass. Housing and Community Development, Lucy Corchado, a Salem native and president of the Point Neighborhood Association, and Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley, archbishop of Boston.

"Throughout the Archdiocese, we hear of experiences that are becoming all too common — families made homeless when they lose their houses to foreclosure, and then have to pay high rents for apartments that are in poor condition,"

O'Malley said in his address.

"We have working people who cannot afford to pay rent, we have elderly residents on fixed incomes who have to choose between paying rent and buying their prescriptions and food."

O'Malley said the Lafayette Street development answers a critical need for safe and affordable housing. He called it "an example of how the church and civic leaders can work together to provide a sustainable response to the need (for housing) while making an important contribution to the economic and social life of the community."

Alberghini said many of the residents of 135 Lafayette St. and others seeking housing are people who work two and three jobs.

"They're working in jobs that provide services to the

community, yet they are unable to afford a place to live in the same community," she said.

Corchado, a longtime advocate for the new housing facility, echoed similar sentiments, adding that the development, with its close proximity to bus and commuter rail transit and its accessible location within the city, will have a positive economic impact.

According to Driscoll, "This is a first-class building that increases the availability of much-needed affordable workforce housing, and it increases the economic vibrancy and vitality of our ever-growing downtown core."

Rev. Daniel Riley of the Salem Catholic Community and retired Rev. Lawrence Rondeau, who served as pastor of the St Joseph's

Church, closed the ceremony with a prayer before the ribbon-cutting took place in front of one of the entrance doors.

The development received funding from the state, the city, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston, North Shore HOME Consortium, MassDevelopment, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership Fund, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Dorene Conlan, vice-president of community development, spoke on behalf of Bank America Merrill Lynch, and Joanne Sullivan, vice president of government and community affairs, spoke on behalf of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston.



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Cardinal O'Malley presents Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll with a gift of appreciation. Wicked Local Photo/ Greg Phipps



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Rev. Lawrence Rondeau, the former pastor of St Joseph's Church and now retired, greets Alberghini prior to the Sept. 27 ceremony. The new housing facility is located at the grounds where the church once stood. Wicked Local Photo/ Greg Phipps