

## Politicians and cardinal break ground at St. Aidan's Congressman Frank criticizes project opponents



Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley, flanked by U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-4th, greets town officials and investors at the groundbreaking for the St. Aidan's project in North Brookline.

PHOTOS BY ZARA TZANEV

By Neal Simpson  
STAFF WRITER

A triumphant group of politicians and church officials broke ground on the long-awaited St. Aidan's project last Wednesday, capping off a six-year fight with neighbors and critics over historical, environmental and legal concerns.

"I know many of you thought this day would never come, but here we are," said Lisa Alberghini, president of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, the Boston Archdiocese's development arm.

With demolition of several adjacent buildings complete, workers will begin converting the former St. Aidan's Church into nine market-rate condominiums. Two buildings with a total of 14 townhouse-style units will be built along Crowninshield Road, while a 36-unit residential building will face Pleasant Street.

The town has contributed \$6 million to the project. The archdiocese began floating plans for an affordable housing development at St. Aidan's in 2001, two years after it shuttered the church because of dwindling attendance.

The project, which now includes a total of 36 affordable housing units and 23 market-rate condos, faced constant criticism by neighbors and critics who said it was too big, used too much town money and offered too few affordable housing units.

In 2005, a group of 75 neighbors sued the arch-

diocese after it reduced the number of affordable housing units in the project. More recently, neighbors have raised concerns about the handling of lead and asbestos during the demolition of a former rectory and garages.

"You shouldn't have to work hard to do something that's good, but if you do you do," said U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-4th, a longtime supporter of the project.

Frank also took the opportunity to point out the project's many detractors, including neighbors he accused of having "misguided objections."

"Not only do I like to say, 'I told you so,' it's one of the few pleasures that improves with age," he said. "And this project has lots of I-told-you-sos."

As officials prepared to break ground, Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley said the archdiocese had found a good compromise between its desire to preserve the church and its mission of creating new affordable housing.

"Certainly, affordable housing makes a great difference in people's lives, the difference between having a decent life and having to eek out an existence," O'Malley said.

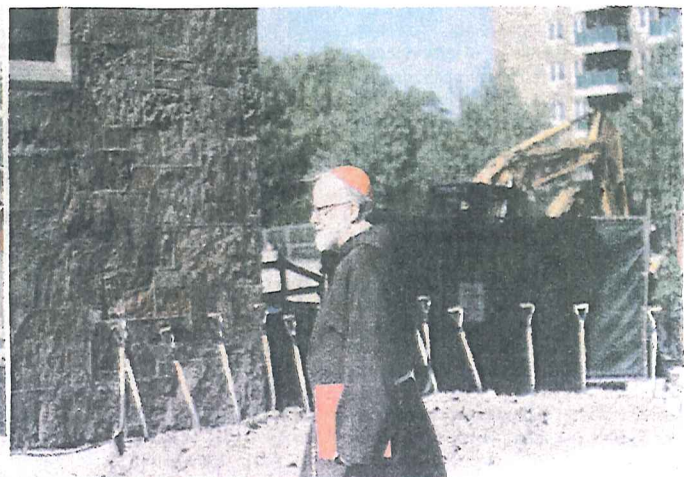
Construction is expected to wrap up in June 2009.

What do you think? Add your comments to this article at [wickedlocal.com/brookline](http://wickedlocal.com/brookline).

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Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley and Lisa Alberghini, director of the archdiocese's development arm, greet Brookline Selectman Bobby Allen, who Alberghini later credited as a major player in moving the controversial St. Aidan's project forward.



Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley strides past a row of shovels at the groundbreaking for the St. Aidan's project, which began construction last week after a six-year battle between the archdiocese's development arm and neighbors.