

# The Boston Globe

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## The Boston Globe

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## WELCOME IN BROOKLINE

**T**HE ST. AIDAN redevelopment project in Brookline offers a window into the difficult world of affordable housing in Massachusetts, where plans to build dwellings suitable for town workers, young couples, and other modest earners have been demolished on the drawing board. It's getting harder to imagine how the state will meet its goal of doubling housing starts when attempts to build even a modest development in one of Greater Boston's larger and more liberal towns drags on for four years.

In 2000, the Archdiocese of Boston called on town officials across the state to drop their traditional resistance to multifamily housing. The church's Planning Office for Urban Affairs reinforced that message a short time later with its own proposal to build a 140-unit housing development on the site of the surplus St. Aidan Church on the town's north side. Ninety-three of the units were to be offered at affordable costs for families with low and moderate incomes, a major opportunity in a town where the median price for a condominium is \$464,000.

A whirlwind of town review committees and public meetings followed. Town officials were supportive in both word and deed, pledging \$4.5 million in public funds for construction. But neighbors objected mightily to the development's scale, while preservationists fought the demolition of the church

where John F. Kennedy was baptized. Naturalists mounted an effort to save a beech tree on the property. Opponents demanded to know why an affordable housing development should be sited in a densely settled neighborhood on the north side of town instead of the leafier southern side. One reason: The 1.8 acre St. Aidan development is a model for smart growth, with two public transit lines running nearby and seats available in nearby schools.

Opponents have succeeded in whittling the development down to just 59 units, 36 of which will be affordable, even though it is not unusual to find housing developments in the area with nearly twice that density. And they are still not satisfied, threatening to press a taxpayer lawsuit against the town. The St. Aidan development deserves to go forward without further impediments. The archdiocese offers easements, underground parking, preservation of the church exterior, and other examples of good faith. The new units would bring Brookline closer to meeting the state requirement that 10 percent of a community's housing stock be affordable, a status that offers real protections against overdevelopment under the state's anti-snob zoning law. Currently, about 8 percent of the units in Brookline are affordable, some 500 units short of the requirement. It's time to give others an opportunity to make themselves at home in Brookline.