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# Chinatown Tower Framed As Beacon Of Housing Hope

New Housing Law Establishes Supportive Housing Pool Fund

Alison Kuznitz  
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Elected officials, including Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, participate in a groundbreaking ceremony for an affordable housing development in downtown Boston on Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2024.

Alison Kuznitz/SHNS

BOSTON, SEPT. 24, 2024.....A new 19-story residential tower is coming to downtown Boston, with a focus on supporting formerly homeless individuals and offering affordable rental options for working-class Bay Staters strained by the state's housing crisis.

State officials and faith leaders participated in a groundbreaking Tuesday, hosted by co-developers St. Francis House day shelter and the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, an arm of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. The mixed-income development at 41 LaGrange St. in Chinatown, a short walk from Boston Common, is slated to have 126 units, including 70 units of permanent supportive housing.

"It's going to be a real home for 70 people who once lived in shelter and sometimes on these very streets -- a place where working-class adults and families struggling to find an affordable place to live amidst all the luxury housing being built in downtown Boston, they too can find an affordable home," Karen LaFrazia, CEO of St. Francis House, said. "And in this residence, people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences are going to become neighbors. We're going to ensure that our neighborhood is rich with diversity and welcoming to all."

LaFrazia said officials are expected to gather for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the site in 2026 to mark the project's completion.

The development, more than a decade in the making, drew praise from Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, Housing and Livable Communities Secretary Ed Augustus, Housing Committee co-chair Sen. Lydia Edwards, and House Ways and Means Chair Aaron Michlewitz. They signaled the project -- which featured collaboration across local and state government, as well as with nonprofit and corporate partners -- can serve as an example for future housing initiatives, buoyed by the new housing bond law, a priority for Gov. Maura Healey.

The law establishes the Supportive Housing Pool Fund, intended to support the creation and operation of permanent supportive housing, said Bill Grogan, president of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs.

"The stability of housing, and for some, combined with case management and supportive services, leads to healthier individuals and stronger, safer communities," Grogan said.

Augustus said the project deploys multiple tools from the housing law.

The secretary estimated nearly \$18 million in tax credits and subsidies have flowed to the development from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Other funding came from MassHousing, the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation, the Boston Mayor's Office of Housing, the Boston Housing Authority, Bank of America and The Life Initiative, developers said.

"So I want to thank Chair Michlewitz and Sen. Edwards, who were really leaders on this bill, for all that they did to make it possible so that there are more days like today all across Massachusetts, building housing for everyone, including folks who are often forgotten or left behind," Augustus said.



A rendering of 41 LaGrange St.

Courtesy of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs

Edwards, in turn, lavished praise on the Healey administration for its focus on housing. She also gestured in the direction of the State House, calling it a "beacon of power."

"But I like to think today we are going to break ground on a beacon of housing dignity," Edwards said, as she echoed an opening prayer delivered by Rev. Msgr. J. Bryan Hehir, secretary of health and social services at the Archdiocese of Boston. "This building will serve that, so that when we look from the State House of what we can do, what we should be doing more of, we can say, 'It's right there -- there's an example of how it gets done together.'"

Sheila Dillon, Boston's housing chief, said the development is "so badly needed" in the city. The Boston Housing Authority has awarded 57 project-based vouchers, which allow low-income residents to live in specific properties and pay roughly 30 percent of their income toward rent, to help make the development possible, Dillon said.

She also noted St. Francis House and other downtown shelters are currently full.

LaFrazia said her shelter supports more than 500 people each day, as providers deal with "unprecedented numbers" of people experiencing homelessness.

"There is a strain right now, especially as we head into winter," Dillon said. "So to create permanent supportive housing with services, I would say in all of my years, it has never, ever been as important as it is right now."



Karen LaFrazia, CEO of St. Francis House, speaks during a groundbreaking for a new affordable housing development in Chinatown on Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2024.

Alison Kuznitz/SHNS

Driscoll issued a broad call for action at the celebratory event: "More, please." The lieutenant governor, drawing laughter from attendees, said she wants to go to neighborhood meetings where residents say, "I wish it could be bigger. I wish we could do more."

"I want to be able to have all of you contributing to that," Driscoll said. "You've got some important deadlines coming up around MBTA Communities Act and opportunities for us to lean into the type of zoning and on-the-ground support to grow the housing that we need across all of our communities because Boston can't do it all -- no one community can. This is an ecosystem that we're creating that relies on all of us to do our part."

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