

Dorchester Reporter

Cote Village: Housing replaces 35 years of blight

By Seth Daniel, News Editor
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City and state officials, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, and members of the Caribbean Integration Development Corporation (CIDC) gathered on June 28 for the ribbon cutting ceremony of Cote Village.

With the price of gasoline skyrocketing and an emphasis on moving away from vehicles in Mattapan, it seems appropriate that the long-abandoned Cote Ford dealership has been replaced by 76 units of affordable community housing with a train to downtown outside the back door.

That irony was not lost on most attendees at last week's official ribbon cutting for Cote Village, which welcomed its first residents starting in February. They had staked a claim for their homes on a property that had come to symbolize the disinvestment and the flight of residents from Mattapan to suburban communities some 35 years ago.



Numerous officials, including development partners Caribbean Integration Development Corporation (CIDC) Director Donald Alexis and Cardinal Sean O'Malley, were on hand on June 28 to officially open the doors to the Cote Village community on Cummins Highway and Regis Road in Mattapan. The development brings units available in a range of affordable housing incomes – from some units set aside for formerly homeless people to those earning 100 percent of the AMI.

The bulk of the homes, 42 units, come in at the 60 percent of AMI level. The project also contains one commercial unit on Cummins Highway that is actively being shopped around the neighborhood, as well as a new office space for CIDC.

New Cote Village resident Tracy Ramos, who is a single mother and paraprofessional at the Mildred Avenue School in Mattapan, said having these kinds of developments on long vacant and blighted property is how residents like her will be able to stay in the city. She was picked in a lottery process to get her affordable unit.

Cardinal Sean O'Malley delivered a bouquet of flowers and a warm welcome to new Cote Village resident Tracy Ramos – who lives in the Cote Townhomes along Regis Road.

“It is important as a community that we use our voice to make more affordable housing opportunities so others like myself will have the opportunity for a home like this,” she said. “A lot of students come up to me at school and they live in multiple places and have lived in a lot of places in only a few years...If we can use our voices as one to tell the city to create more housing like this on vacant land, we will be able to make a difference.”

Cote Village was developed after some eight years of wrangling and discussion, with the community on Woodhaven Street pushing the city to put the property out for development, all of which came after Cote Ford abandoned its dealership more than 30 years ago and left the property to disintegrate into blight.

Going back to the late Mayor Tom Menino's administration when a working group was formed, the property has seen previous attempts to develop it, including market rate projects that the community turned away.

CIDC joined forces with the Archdiocese of Boston's Planning Office for Urban Affairs for the Cote Village development. They are now partnering on the Morton Village development now under construction.

“You see gentrification eating up affordable housing in neighborhoods like Mattapan and more and more people are being displaced,” said Cardinal O'Malley. “These efforts are very, very important and we need to identify more groups to work together for more Cote Villages and more affordable housing in our community.”

Added Alexis, “We all stand here looking at a site that was environmentally contaminated – a site that was previously abandoned for over 35 years. We all came together with the realization this community can do better. We came with an idea to build homes for current residents and to build a community with possibility, opportunity, and a step toward the aspirations for our Mattapan community. Today we have delivered that vision and that dream.”

He added that it isn't wrong for Mattapan residents – many of whom are essential workers – to feel anxious about staying in the community as rents and prices continue to rise. He said far too many are bunking with family members and extended family.

“It should not be that way,” he said.

Though outside his district, state Rep. Russell Holmes said that Cote Village is was very meaningful to him. “We grew up across the street seeing this place as a piece of junk – a real piece of junk,” he said. “We’ve seen three proposals for this site, and this is the third. I was adamant about this one because I knew this could not fail. We had to get this over the finish line...This is our entrance to Mattapan Square and as you come over that hill now, isn't it great to see something different?”

Concluding the ceremony, state Rep. Brandy Fluker-Oakley's office presented the Woodhaven Culbert Regis Neighborhood Association with certificate of appreciation for their years of advocacy in pushing the city and state to redevelop the area.

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