

# Fenway rooming house to become affordable housing after long battle and legal settlement

Two nonprofits reached a deal to buy Our Lady's Guild House from the Catholic order that has long operated it.

By [Andrew Brinker](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated March 24, 2023, 6:03 p.m.



Our Lady's Guild House at 20 Charlesgate West, near Kenmore Square. NATHAN KLIMA FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The saga of Our Lady's Guild House — a rooming house for single women in the Fenway where residents faced rent hikes, eviction notices, and the prospect of a sale — finally

appears settled after a pair of nonprofits have reached a tentative deal to buy the property and maintain it as deed-restricted affordable housing.

The agreement to acquire the property on Charlesgate West comes the same week that its owner, the Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, settled claims of discrimination on the basis of age and disability with Attorney General Andrea Campbell.

The settlement, announced Wednesday, requires the Connecticut-based order of Catholic nuns to pay \$115,000, as well as protect the remaining longtime tenants from eviction or rent increases while the sale is pending. All of the building's 140 single-resident-occupancy-style units will be preserved as deed-restricted affordable housing, a stipulation the order outlined when it [put the property up for sale in 2021](#) and which Campbell's office required as a term of the settlement.

"Our elders and residents living with disabilities deserve more than just our respect," Campbell said in a statement. "We owe them an opportunity to live long and healthy lives, free from discrimination and the fear of being pushed out of their homes."

The guild house is set to be purchased by the Fenway Community Development Corporation and the Planning Office for Urban Affairs — an affordable housing developer affiliated with the Archdiocese of Boston — with backing from other nonprofit groups and the Mayor's Office of Housing. The new owners plan to invest resources into rehabilitating the building.

Final terms of the purchase have not yet been reached, but the sale would [put an end to a tumultuous saga](#) that began when the order switched property management companies around 15 years ago. That's when, tenants alleged in a complaint filed with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, the new management company, Marc Roos Realty, began raising rents. Longtime tenants, many of whom were elderly, said the order was attempting to push them out and replace them with students who were willing to pay higher rents. The order has owned the building since 1947, and long operated it as a rooming house for single women, offering relatively low rents.

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A rally in support of residents of Our Lady's Guild House in 2019. JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Between 2009 and 2019, the complaint alleged, the population of 18- to 29-year-olds in the building increased from 16 to 85, whittling the number of tenants over 50 years old down to just eight.

Today, the building is fully occupied, said Richard Giordano, director of policy and community planning at the Fenway CDC, and 95 percent of those tenants are students.

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“Most of the ladies that lived there when this whole saga began are gone now,” said Giordano. “They deserve better than that, and we’re happy to finally be preserving this building for something good.”

The purchase is another in a line of property acquisitions from nonprofit groups and tenant associations in Boston, a trend that has picked up steam in recent years as housing costs in Boston have spiraled. Earlier this year, the East Boston Community Development Corporation [purchased a portfolio of 114 apartments](#) with the backing of other nonprofits and the city, one of the largest deals of its kind.

Advocates have fought for a bill in recent years, the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, that would give residents a chance to form tenants’ associations and buy their building before the owner sells on the private market.

The purchase of the rooming house, said Sheila Dillon, the city’s chief of housing, should serve as a model for the city moving forward.

“This initiative is a beacon of hope for the future of affordable housing in Boston and a reminder of the power of collaboration in creating lasting change,” she said in a statement.

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