

Historic Fenway building to be renovated, creating affordable housing

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Margot Murphy

Home of the Our Lady's Guild House, the building at 20 Charlesgate W. features many single occupant apartments. The Our Lady Guild House is surrounded by areas to dine and shop. A public meeting held Sept. 19 allowed people to ask questions about the possibility of renovating the building.

Located at 20 Charlesgate W., **Our Lady's Guild House** is planning a renovation to create more affordable housing in the Fenway area. In October 2023, the Fenway Community Development Corporation, or Fenway CDC, along with the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, or POUA, purchased the historic building, located between Commonwealth Avenue and Fenway Park, with the aim to create affordable housing in the area.



Boston's planning department held a **public meeting** via Zoom Sept. 19, offering residents and the general neighborhood public the opportunity to ask project managers questions and learn more about the building renovations.



“We’re really excited to share this project with everyone,” said Phil Crean, project manager with POUA, at the meeting. “I know that it’s been a lot of years coming.”

The **renovations** will create 86 units in the six-story building: 22 enhanced single occupancy rooms, 45 studios and 19 one-bedroom apartments. There will be 24/7 surveillance and security, an elevator, a community room with a kitchen, storage spaces, an office, laundry facilities and more. Eighty-one units will be set aside for

those making 30% to 60% area median income, or AMI, and five units will be available for long-term residents.

Currently, the building provides affordable housing to those who identify as female, but the new renovations would make the space co-ed. The historic integrity and complete exterior, aside from the addition of a ramp by the outside stairs for accessibility, will be preserved as the interior updates occur.

The project's developers, the **Fenway CDC** and the POUA, both aim to create a successful and smooth transition from the current state of the house to the future plan, and said they intend to meet with residents frequently to better understand their needs.

Construction is projected to take about 18 to 20 months after the state provides "competitive funding sources," Crean said. "We don't see construction starting any sooner than mid-2026. The team is getting ready to apply to a funding round here now that the state's opened up."

Around December, developers plan to apply for additional funding and will likely hear back regarding approval in spring 2025. Construction can only begin once the money is approved.

Several attendees at the public meeting were current residents of Our Lady's Guild House. Some asked clarifying questions about the amenities such as storage and security while others wondered about the **AMI percentage range for apartments**.

Project developers and architect Laura Cella-Mowatt answered questions from meeting attendees. "My focus is renovation, I've done a lot of work in Boston," Cella-Mowatt said. "I am particularly excited about this beautiful building."

According to Crean, current residents of the house will be relocated closer to the start of the renovation date to other properties based on what would best suit their individual needs.

Other attendees included passionate neighborhood occupants like Conrad Ciszek, who took a moment to appreciate the talents of those leading the project.

“Had it not been for all of the collective activism, this place would’ve been grabbed up by real estate vultures,” Ciszek said. “It would’ve been an unaffordable, luxury-price eye-sore high rise. But what we’re going to have is a preserved historical building that’s going to offer great resources and affordable housing in this environment where it’s badly needed.”