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Mattapan residents weigh impacts of Cote Village build-out

By **Caleb Nelson**, Reporter Correspondant
Feb. 4, 2016



Residents listened to a presentation on plans for the Cote Village project last week. Caleb Nelson photo

About 80 people packed into a community room at the Foley Senior Residences on River Street last Thursday night to hear the latest plans for Cote Village, a proposed 76-unit housing development that is under review by the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Billed as an effort to better link the commercial district of Mattapan Square to residential neighborhoods, the project will be located on the corner of Cummins Highway and Regis Road on the site of an old auto dealership that was abandoned decades ago.

Once completed, it will be the most significant new housing project in the neighborhood in years and one that is closely associated with a commuter rail station along the Fairmount Line that is set to be built in the coming months.

Last year, the city's Department of Neighborhood Development (DND), which controls the property, selected a partner to re-develop the site after a community process that included three other proposals. The winning bid was submitted by a team of partners including the Archdiocese of Boston's Planning Office for Urban Affairs, Caribbean Integration Community Development, and the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust, which is acting as the project's financing partner.

The project will include a four-story apartment building housing 47 units and commercial space, including a 7,000 square-foot pre-teen center. The site will also include townhouses on Regis Road that would add another 24 units of housing. The development will also have 30,000 square feet of green, open space and 84 off-street parking spaces, according to a handout circulated at last week's meeting.

"We're trying to make sure that we provide high quality, high class housing," said Lisa Alberghini, the president of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs who addressed the crowd at the meeting. "One of our objectives was to make that corner more welcoming. The lines of the building are soft with rich color and texture and materials, and the idea is that we could break down some of that barrier that you see

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there now by creating green spaces.”

The Cote Village Project will include a mix of low, moderate and market rate rental options ranging from just over \$1,000 to about \$1,700 a month, with heat and hot water included. There will also be eight units available to people with incomes of \$30,700 or less. Renters of those units will pay 30 percent of their income in rent. Those units will be available through a lottery process.

David Black, a consultant for the proponents, spoke briefly about traffic concerns, saying that residential projects tend not to attract a lot of external traffic. “We won’t change any levels of service by adding these trips,” he said. “We are very well aware that there are significant parking issues in the neighborhood and the first thing that was a priority was to provide parking on this site to the people who are going to be living in these units.”

During a lengthy question and answer period, Mattapan resident Vella Olivier asked how the property owners will determine the rent. “My concern is that I will not be able to afford the monthly rent, because I want to stay in Mattapan. A lot of my mentors are in Mattapan. I do a lot of volunteer work in Mattapan, but I don’t know if I would be able to afford the housing,” she said. Such concerns about displacement were echoed by several people in the meeting.

On that point, Mayor Martin Walsh told the Reporter last week that his administration is actively seeking to ease anxieties about potential displacement. “People all over the city are worried about gentrification and being forced out of their neighborhoods,” he said at an event on Dudley Street last Friday. “When we put our housing plan out there, one of the biggest costs for housing is the land, and if we own land, and we can use that land to build on, the land costs go significantly lower, and eventually that piece of land that we own in the city goes on the tax rolls. So there’s a public benefit there, and there’s a neighborhood benefit there.”

Construction at the Cote site will be done entirely by union labor. Several union representatives spoke at the meeting about recruiting young people into the building trades.

Charles J. Cofield, who grew up in Mattapan, came to the meeting to represent the Local 67 Carpenters Union, which is based in Dorchester. He encouraged everyone there to help him make sure that at least 50 percent of the people working on construction sites in Boston are locals.

“We need to change the way that people think and look at unions,” said Cofield. “The union changed my life. It has offered me and my family a better way to live. If you know some folks that like to work with their hands, or would like to be a part of an organization that can give you a living wage so that they’ll be able to afford to live here in Boston, send them to me,” he added. “A lot of these non-union companies out here are not playing fair.”

There were objections to the development at the meeting. An abutter, Jacques Dady-Jean, whose Regis Road property sits next to the site, said that other neighbors on his street had not been properly engaged in the planning process. “We had a vision. None of the vision we set is in that plan,” he said. “Nobody knew about what was going on.”

The comment period for this project ends next Friday, Feb. 12. As of last Monday, no one had submitted any feedback in writing, according to BRA project manager Lance Campbell. Mattapan residents are encouraged to contact Campbell at lance.campbell@boston.gov or at 617-918-4311.

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