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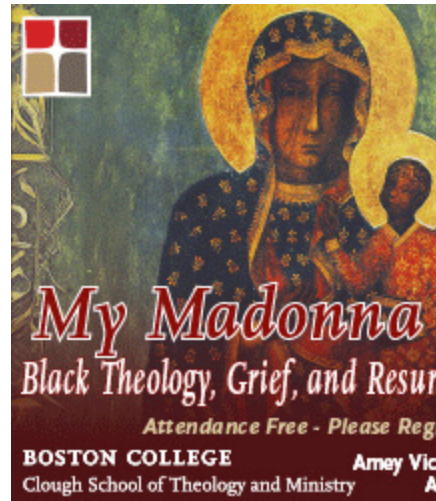
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**POUA expands mission as local housing needs grow**

by [Wes Cipolla](#) Pilot Staff



The Morton Station Village housing development in Mattapan is pictured April 7. The development is one of several recently completed or underway projects of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs. Pilot photo/Wes Cipolla



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MATTAPAN -- "Do you think I look like a basketball player, and a drum?" asks a rough stone pillar off Morton Street in Mattapan. "Well, if you guess no, you got it wrong. So athletic, talented, full of joy, and thankful, that's what I am."

The words carved into the pillar, pelted with rain on the morning of April 7, were penned by Steven Odom. He wrote the poem, entitled "I Am," just over a year before he was shot and killed in Dorchester in 2007. He was 13 years old. The pillar inscribed with his words is the centerpiece

Planning Office for Urban Affairs, the housing ministry of the Archdiocese of Boston.

"His parents have really tried to carry on his legacy," said Lois Alksninis, POUA's communications and fundraising manager, as she stood outside the garden. "And it was really their vision."



Morton Station Village was a joint product of POUA, the City of Boston, and the local advocacy group Caribbean Integration Community Development. The development opened its doors in late 2023 and provides 40 units of income-restricted housing, including 12 units set aside for homeownership. Morton Station Village is steps from public transportation and includes a gym, a laundry room, and a community room for birthday parties, meetings, and baby showers. When the development opened, POUA received 2,000 applications for its 40 units.

"It's hard" to turn people away, Alksninis said. "There's so much demand right now, and unfortunately, it takes so long to build, whether it's permitting, community pushback, litigation,

POUA has risen up to meet the demand as much as it can, with a massive increase in new developments. Morton Station Village is one of three POUA developments in the Mattapan neighborhood, where rising rents threaten to price longtime residents out of their homes. 150 River Street Village, a POUA affordable senior housing development in Mattapan, opened in late 2025. All 30 of its housing units were occupied in less than a month. POUA also recently celebrated the completion of the 76-unit Cote Village Apartments in Mattapan. On Lafayette Street in Downtown Boston, POUA is building a 19-story development in collaboration with St. Francis House, which will provide 126 units of affordable housing. Seventy of those units will be set aside for homeless people. This fall, construction will begin on a 121-unit development in Brockton on land formerly owned by the Sisters of Jesus Crucified. Fifteen of those units will be set aside for homeownership. POUA is advocating for "Yes in God's Backyard" legislation that would speed up approval processes for developments on land owned by religious groups.

This fall will also see construction start on a 71-unit housing project for women and children who have been victims of domestic violence in collaboration with St. Mary's Center. POUA is eyeing two buildings in Roxbury to purchase and convert into 95 housing units. In the same neighborhood, POUA plans to build 217 housing units around St. Katharine Drexel Parish Center. The ministry's projects are even expanding outside the archdiocese. The conversion of an office building in Worcester into 22 housing units is scheduled for completion in June. In Attleboro, POUA will collaborate with Father Bill's and MainSpring to build 50 units of emergency family housing. POUA is currently developing a total of 1,600 housing units. Since its founding in 1969, it has developed 3,300 units.

"I think people are seeing the need and the mission for sure."

POUA President Bill Grogan said that over the next 10 years, Massachusetts will need 222,000 additional housing units to keep up with increased demand. More than half of households in the state spend over 30 percent of their income on housing.

"Housing isn't being produced fast enough, it isn't affordable enough for families," Grogan told The Pilot in a March 30 interview, "and as a result, it's caused an increase in homelessness within Massachusetts, a higher cost of living."

The severe housing shortage is just one factor in POUA's growth. In 2024, Gov. Maura Healey signed the Affordable Homes Act, which provided more resources and funding for affordable housing projects, including homeownership. On the federal level, the expansion of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program has made it easier for POUA projects to receive funding.

"We view this as a human right, that we have a moral obligation to ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home," Grogan said. "And if we're not doing what we can to meet the needs of Massachusetts residents, the housing crisis is only going to get worse."

Along with POUA's growth have come many challenges. Recent federal funding cuts, and ensuing state and local cuts, have severely decreased the amount of resources available for affordable housing. It can take anywhere from nine months to two years for projects to receive

"So while there have been some positive things, there also continues to be a challenging environment in which to develop affordable housing," Grogan said.

Any project POUA undertakes has an estimated completion date of five to eight years after its inception. Drexel Village, the development planned for St. Katharine Drexel Parish Center, has been in the works since 2018. During a March community meeting, Grogan announced that plans for Drexel Village to include affordable homeownership units and over 50 underground parking spaces had to be scrapped for the project to continue. This was met with dismay from community members.

"At the end of the day, time is the biggest enemy and stumbling block for projects," Grogan said.

He explained that the 2008 financial crisis wiped out many programs that supported affordable homeownership. Such programs have made a comeback in the last five years but have faced enormous demand. Homeownership housing is more expensive to build than rental housing, because developers have to cover the deficit caused by selling the home at an affordable price that's far less than the cost to build it.

"It's unfortunate, because I think we recognize the importance of homeownership housing in building wealth and equity, and that's something that's been a longstanding tenet and a longstanding part of the work that the Planning Office has done," Grogan said.

Drexel Village was, especially when it comes to homeownership units. That makes the future of POUA's developments more precarious and even more important, he said. The plan is for POUA to seek out as many resources as possible, including partnering with financial institutions.

"We're in a critical moment here," he said, "and we have to do everything that we can do to make sure that we're working to expand housing development and do what we do best, which is develop affordable housing."

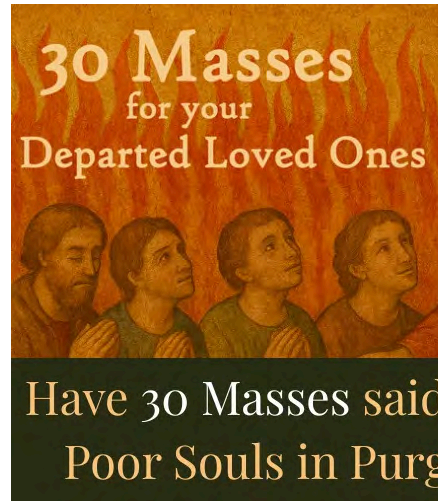
Alksninis said she is proud that Morton Station Village provides a path to homeownership for "folks that were getting priced out of the Mattapan neighborhood."

"The mix of rental and homeownership, I think we worked with the community on that, which was great," she said. "The community really pushed for homeownership units, which I think can be a little trickier."

David Arthur, senior portfolio manager for Maloney Properties, said that affordable housing is "what this area needs more than anything." Maloney Properties manages Morton Station Village. Seventy-five percent of the properties in Arthur's portfolio are POUA-affiliated.

"We're very, very lucky to have the partnership or relationship that we do," he said. "We think it's been fantastic so far. We're looking forward to many more of these in the future."

"At the end of the day, the most important thing is our residents, and that's been fantastic, and they've been really happy," he said.



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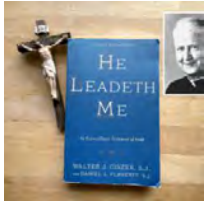
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