

# Plan filed to convert hotel into affordable housing in Charlestown Navy Yard

By **Shirley Leung** Globe Columnist, Updated September 6, 2023, 29 minutes ago



On Wednesday, the Archdiocese of Boston and its partner St. Francis House formally notified the BPDA about their plan to convert the shuttered Constitution Inn in Charlestown into affordable housing. JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF


Building affordable housing in Boston is no easy task, but we must keep at it.

The latest effort comes from the Archdiocese of Boston and its partner St. Francis House, which on Wednesday formally notified the Boston Planning & Development Agency about their plan to convert a shuttered hotel into affordable housing in Charlestown.

The archdiocese’s development arm — known as the Planning Office for Urban Affairs — and St. Francis House — a homeless services provider — have met with Charlestown residents for close to a year about a project at the former Constitution Inn in the Navy Yard. It would create much-needed low-income housing, including some for formerly homeless people who are supported by social workers and offered services such as counseling and health care.

The community meetings about the [project have been contentious, which is not uncommon](#) even as the region faces a housing crisis. Tensions seem to rise when so-called supportive housing for formerly homeless people comes into the picture.

Responding to concerns, the Planning Office for Urban Affairs and St. Francis House spent months meeting with residents and refining the proposal. As a result, the project will feature 100 affordable rental units — about 20 percent fewer than what was originally discussed, according to their filing with BPDA.



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Of those, 52 units will be restricted to households with annual incomes of \$30,000 to \$83,000, while 48 units will be supportive housing for households headed by women or veterans only.

The hotel, operated by the YMCA of Greater Boston as a gym and pool, sits on land owned by the BPDA. The Planning Office for Urban Affairs and the St. Francis House have taken over the YMCA'S long-term lease in hopes of redeveloping the site into affordable housing.

The YMCA plans to remain at the hotel under a lease-back arrangement with the Planning Office for Urban Affairs and St. Francis House, and the facility will be renovated.

There's a lot to like about this proposal, especially since two groups behind it seem willing to listen to the community and make adjustments. They've done this before.

For more than half a century, the [Planning Office for Urban Affairs](#) has created similar housing throughout the region from Boston to Lowell. For more than three decades, [St. Francis House](#) has offered services to homeless people and more recently created supportive housing.

I would be naive to think this preliminary filing — which will be followed in the coming weeks by a more detailed plan — will quell all neighborhood opposition.



The Harborwalk in Charlestown, a short walk from the shuttered Constitution Inn. JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Some residents seem dug in and launched [Neighborhood Voice Alliance](#), a nonprofit group that seems designed to stop the project. An alliance [fundraiser in July](#) at the historic Warren Tavern in Charlestown was marketed as raising money for “legal activities and awareness” to stop the affordable housing project.

Alliance leaders could not immediately be reached for comment. The Planning Office for Urban Affairs declined additional comment beyond its filing.

We’ve seen these neighborhood dynamics play out before. In Dorchester, a proposal to convert the Comfort Inn on Morrissey Boulevard into supportive housing spurred fierce opposition from neighbors.

Blame it on the fear factor about bringing into their backyards [“Mass. and Cass”](#) and along with it the criminal elements that have plagued the streets of Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard for years.

[Advocates who work with homeless people](#) will tell you Mass. and Cass is hardly representative of that population, and that by the time people move into supportive housing they are sober, and ready to lead quiet, stable lives.

The opposition was also loud in Dorchester, but ultimately the [BPDA in May approved](#) a plan by homeless service provider Pine Street Inn and nonprofit developer The Community Builders. To address neighborhood concerns, Pine Street and Community Builders also shrunk the size of their project to 99 units from 110 and is giving preference to prospective tenants over age 62.

In Dorchester, a silent majority seemed to be in favor of the Comfort Inn project. I hope the same is true in Charlestown. I am told the proposal in principle has received over 75 letters of support.

One longtime Charlestown resident who's not shy about his support for redeveloping the Constitution Inn is Michael Parker. He lives a two-minute walk from the site, and as a member of the YMCA, he is there often for fitness classes from spinning to yoga.

"Everyone is entitled to good quality of affordable housing, and that's the goal here," said Parker, who is chair of the [Friends of Charlestown Navy Yard](#), a neighborhood improvement group. He spoke offering his personal opinion.

"When we have people placed in good quality, affordable housing," he added, "it's just good for society, it's good for us, it's good for the city."

Now the proposal is heading to a formal community process led by BPDA. The opposition will be loud, and it will be up to the silent majority and Mayor Michelle Wu to help get this over the finish line. Our affordable housing crisis doesn't get solved on its own. It will be project by project, neighborhood by neighborhood.



The shuttered Constitution Inn in Charlestown. JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

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