

Local

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Planning Office breaks ground on Mattapan senior housing project

by Wes Cipolla Pilot Staff



MATTAPAN – Sheila Dillon, chief of housing for the City of Boston, is used to receiving "painful calls" from some of the 82,000 older adults living in the city.

Of those 82,000, half of them are renters, and according to Dillon, half of those renters are "severely rent-burdened." Their median yearly income is between \$40,000 and \$50,000. When these older adults call Sheila, it's because they are being forced to leave housing units that they have called home for decades.

"We've got a crisis with our older adults," Dillon said.

The Planning Office of Urban Affairs, a social justice ministry of the Archdiocese of Boston, which seeks to combat Massachusetts's affordable housing crisis, is also aware of the harm that skyrocketing housing prices causes to senior citizens. POUA President Bill Grogan said that, all too often, older adults discover that they can no longer afford to live in the neighborhoods they spent their whole lives in.

"Almost every day, we read an article, a story highlighting the high cost of housing, the lack of meaningful affordable housing opportunities, or zoning restrictions that inhibit development," Grogan said, "and the impact that each of these has on our households, communities, and families, and have created the moral and societal crisis that we find ourselves in today."

In response to the crisis, POUA has collaborated with the City of Boston, the state and federal governments, and Caribbean Integration Community Development, a nonprofit which aims to improve quality of life for minority communities in Boston, to break ground on a new senior housing development in Mattapan. A ceremonial groundbreaking for River Street Village, which will provide 30 units of affordable senior housing at 150 River Street, was held on June 12.

"In the midst of this housing crisis," Grogan said at the groundbreaking, "the River Street Village is an example of what's possible when the federal government, the Commonwealth, the city, and the state come together with mission-driven partners to create a housing development that comes out of the community."

When River Street Village is completed in a year's time, it will contain 30 one-bedroom units that are affordable for those making anywhere from 30 percent to 70 percent of the area's median income. The development, located within walking distance of the Central Avenue Mattapan Trolley Station, will also be home to community space and a garden open to the public.

"The project really is about building community assets, partnerships, and connections to bring people together," Grogan said. "And we look forward to the day when the diversity of the community can come together and enjoy this new space."

Massachusetts Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll participated in the groundbreaking.

"Nobody believes more strongly than Lt. Gov. Driscoll that all people deserve an affordable home," Grogan said. "Lt. Gov. Driscoll really recognizes that housing must be affordable to everyone to advance a strong, vibrant, inclusive commonwealth."

In her remarks, Lt. Gov. Driscoll praised POUA and CICD for being "two terrific development partners."

together to put our hands up to say yes for the type of housing we need."

The lieutenant governor said that no matter where she and Gov. Maura Healey go in Massachusetts, housing is the top priority for every local official.

"I want the folks who pour coffee and pour beer for a living, and the individuals who care for our kids, and the heroes during COVID who checked out groceries and stocked shelves," she said. "I want those folks to live in my community, too. And so we are so committed to trying to find ways to build lots more projects like this one that enable individuals to age in... the communities they know and love."

Bishop Peter Uglietto delivered a blessing at the groundbreaking.

"We are grateful for Gov. Healey's and Mayor Wu's administrations," he said, "for their support of this archdiocesan initiative which will provide safe, affordable housing for senior citizens whose presence greatly enhances this local community."

CICD President Donald Alexis said that older adults often lose touch with the wider community because they have a harder time leaving the house, but this won't be a problem at River Street Village.

"A goal of this development is to make sure it is accessible living for them," he said, "where they can make new friends, enjoy hobbies, and garden... for them to continue their lives as productive members of the society."

He described Mattapan as a working-class immigrant neighborhood, and said that those demographics will be represented by the residents of River Street Village.

"Their dreams are our dreams," he said, and the dream we want for any older adult in our lives, like our parents, grandparents, aunties, and neighbors."