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The entrance to the Northridge cooperative housing community in Beverly. Google Maps, Copyright 2025 Google

Planning Office celebrates 50th anniversary of first development

Wes Cipolla Pilot Staff [LOCAL](#) FRIDAY 24TH OF OCTOBER 2025

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BRAINTREE -- Pamela Irwin Poleo came to Northridge in Beverly because she wanted an inclusive place to raise a family.

Irwin Poleo moved into the development, a 14-acre, 98-unit cooperative built by the Archdiocese of Boston's Planning Office for Urban Affairs, in January 1977. Residents don't buy the units, but buy shares of stock in the cooperative.

"Everyone here has a piece of the ownership," Irwin Poleo said. "Therefore, everyone has a voice."

Northridge opened in 1975. It was the first development by POUA, which was founded by Cardinal Richard Cushing and Msgr. Michael Groden in 1969 to create housing for low-income and vulnerable populations. The goal was to create egalitarian developments where high- and low-income residents would live side-by-side, with the same dignity. Cardinal Humberto Medeiros announced Northridge's construction in 1974, saying that it was a step in combating racism, classism, and the lack of affordable housing in Massachusetts.

opportunity," the cardinal said at the time.

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As a Catholic, Irwin Poleo appreciated that her neighborhood was built by the archdiocese. In the last 50 years, a lot has changed, but Northridge is still an intimate community -- nine residents have lived there since opening day. They were honored at a 50th anniversary celebration for Northridge held on Oct. 5. The development's residents are diverse in race, religion, and income. To Irwin Poleo, it's a microcosm of the U.S.

"All of those kinds of things are still what Northridge is about," she said.

Her children, now grown, tell her that their favorite part about growing up in Northridge was having so many friends to play with. The development still has a lot of young families, and Irwin Poleo sees kids using the neighborhood playground and basketball court. She said it's one of the last affordable options for homeownership in the area.

"I love my unit," she said. "I still love the concept of the cooperative. It's provided all of us an opportunity for homeownership, even the low-income people who may never have that opportunity."

She plans to stay in Northridge for the rest of her life.

"It's a real credit to the vision and the work of Msgr. Michael Groden and Cardinal Medeiros," said POUA President Bill Grogan.

Northridge was one of the first housing developments built in Massachusetts under the so-called "anti-snob zoning law" of 1969, also known as 40B. The law allowed the state government to override a town or city's refusal to build low-income housing in its jurisdiction. Grogan said that POUA still encounters "NIMBY" ("Not in my backyard") attitudes while planning new developments, but more and more state officials are making Massachusetts's affordable housing crisis a priority.

"People have begun to recognize the moral obligation that we have to provide affordable housing," he said.

His proudest moments are seeing individuals and families move into new housing. When the 80-unit Cote Village development opened in Mattapan in 2022, he and Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley welcomed families and listened to their stories.

"They couldn't afford to continue to live where they were, and the challenges that they were having to make ends meet, that this was giving them a new opportunity," he said. "This was giving them a place where they could feel comfortable and safe and not have to worry about the high cost of housing."

POUA is now one of the largest non-profit housing developers in the Northeast and one of the largest Catholic diocesan housing ministries in the U.S. Since its founding, it has created over 3,000 units for 11,000 residents. POUA recently completed construction on River Street Village, a 30-unit senior housing development in Mattapan and 41 LaGrange, a 19-story, 126-unit mixed-income development in Downtown Boston, is currently under construction. Grogan said that over 20 new projects are in "various stages of development." These projects, in places like Boston, Brockton, Gloucester, Needham, and Newton, will provide 2,000 units of affordable and mixed-income housing.

"The Planning Office has had a long history of both advocacy and development of affordable housing, and recognizing that housing is a human right," Grogan said. "It's at the core of the mission of the Planning Office that everyone deserves a roof over their heads and should have a safe affordable home."

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