

IN PERSON

Relationships Lead to Creative Real Estate Opportunities

By [Steve Adams](#) | Banker & Tradesman Staff | Apr 20, 2025 | [Reprints](#) | [Unlock Link](#) | [Print](#)



Photo courtesy of Preservation of Affordable Housing

William Grogan
President, Planning Office of Urban Affairs
Age: 54
Industry experience: 30 years

Boston-based Planning Office of Urban Affairs started out building affordable housing more than 40 years ago, leveraging the state's new Chapter 40B zoning law to construct multifamily projects in suburban communities including Beverly and Scituate. Since then, it's completed more than 3,100 housing units in 21 Massachusetts communities. Last fall, POUA and St. Francis House broke ground on a 19-story residential tower at 41 LaGrange St. in downtown Boston, and POUA is assembling financing for a 300,000 square foot development known as Drexel Village in Roxbury. A former real estate attorney at Goulston & Storrs, Bill Grogan joined POUA in 2005 and was promoted to president in 2019.

Q: What's the history of the organization and its relationship to the Archdiocese of Boston?

A: The Planning Office for Urban Affairs was created in 1969 by then-Monsignor Michael Grodin. At the time, it was really a response to the housing challenges that were occurring in the Boston urban areas, and really seeing the need for housing as a human right and social justice issue. POUA was created as a nonprofit organization that was financially separate from the Archdiocese, but the archbishop of Boston was a member of the corporation, so he appoints the board of directors and the president. Our revenue comes from three main sources: development fees we earn from affordable housing projects, cash flow from the affordable housing projects we own and control and fundraising from corporate and philanthropic foundations.

Q: Which Trump administration policies will have the greatest effects on nonprofit developers?

A: There are a couple of areas of concern. One is around tariffs and projects we currently have in construction. At 41 Lagrange St., we are in the process of fabricating steel and just received a notice from the subcontractor that they are putting us on notice that there may be an increase due to the tariffs going into effect shortly. That is of real concern. And we are also receiving notices from other subcontractors warning of price increases for other supplies and materials. For our projects that don't have a lot of margins, it's a real concern.

On the funding side, we are concerned about cuts to resources that support energy upgrades and sustainable development work, as we make the transition to all-electric buildings. Also, there's uncertainty about the programs at projects we have under way. The River Street project is utilizing the federal Section 202 program, which supports the development of affordable senior housing. There haven't been any cuts to that program I'm aware of, but everyone is concerned about what programs may be affected down the line.



Drexel Village development in Roxbury, a joint venture of POUA and J. Garland Enterprises, will include three mixed-income buildings containing 217 rental and home ownership housing units. Image courtesy of JGE Architecture + Design and The Architectural Team

Q: POUA is partnering with J. Garland Enterprises on the Drexel Village development in Roxbury. What are the next steps in the development timeline?

A: We received our Article 80 approval in January, and now we're working on the financing: submitting applications to the state in late summer for low-income tax credits. And we have a 121-unit project in Brockton, the Thatcher Street housing, which we anticipate starting at the beginning of next year. We have all of our financing and are waiting for tax-exempt bonds coming in the first part of 2026. That project is 15 home ownership units and 106 mixed-income rental units.

Q: What capital improvements are planned for Our Lady's Guild House in the Fenway following your 2023 acquisition along with the Fenway Community Development Corp.?

A: It's in acceptable condition but will need significant upgrades, energy improvements and new elevators. We'll be converting the single-occupancy units into studios and one-bedroom units. Every unit will have a kitchen and bath.

Q: How do you make connections with property owners for site acquisitions?

A: We continue to be approached by owners of properties, interestingly, both in Boston and the metro area, and have one or two under due diligence right now. One that we completed last year: an order of sisters had an eight-room home on the South Shore that they were looking to sell. They approached us and asked if we had an interest, and we acquired that and converted it into a home for survivors of trafficking and sex exploitation. We were looking for housing for an at-risk population, and hadn't found anything yet. We were fortunate they reached out to us at the right time. As a result of our relationships with other religious orders and nonprofits, we're in a position to be able to acquire properties and use them in creative ways.

Grogan's Five Favorite Activities Outside Work:

1. Playing the harmonica
2. Running 5Ks with his dog
3. Spend time with his family on Cape Cod
4. Ski in the winter and bike in the summer
5. Attend Boston sporting events

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