

# The Pilot

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## Planning Office to develop space for Nubian Square, St. Katharine Drexel community

Jacqueline Tetrault Pilot Staff LOCAL FRIDAY 17TH OF DECEMBER 2021

**R** OXBURY -- The Planning Office for Urban Affairs, in partnership with J. Garland Enterprises, is moving forward with a development plan that would expand St. Katharine Drexel Parish's outreach and serve the people of Nubian Square by providing affordable housing, public space, social services, economic opportunities, and community programs.

The plan concerns the Crescent Parcel, eight pieces of vacant land located at the corner of Tremont Street and Melnea Cass Boulevard, totaling approximately 72,900 square feet. Two pieces are owned by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), three by the City of Boston, and three by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. While the land stood vacant for several decades, the community tried several planning initiatives considering how to best utilize the area. All of these initiatives prioritized having open community space and affordable mixed-income housing.

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"We are committed to facilitating a future for Crescent Parcel that supports the surrounding community, creating affordable housing and supporting local small businesses," BPDA Director Brian Golden said in a Nov. 18 press release.

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Nearby is St. Katharine Drexel Parish Center on Ruggles Street, in the former St. Francis de Sales Church. Over the past year, the Planning Office for Urban Affairs (POUA) has been working with St. Katharine Drexel Parish on a plan that would incorporate their parish center and the adjacent Crescent Parcel. Partnering with J. Garland Enterprises (JGE), a fully minority-owned real estate firm, they put together a development team whose members are more than 70 percent minority and women-led businesses with deep roots in the local community.

When the BPDA sent out a request for proposals in April of this year, the team submitted a proposal for a development called Drexel Village, which would include mixed income housing, home ownership opportunities, and space for businesses, social services, public art and community engagement. Under this plan, the parish center would be taken down and its services would be relocated into the new facilities.

The BPDA approved the team's designation as the developer at their November board meeting.

"This is really an opportunity to combine all of those parcels and to plan for a development effort that would have a transformative impact," POUA President William Grogan said in a Dec. 13 interview.

An important aspect of the proposal is offering affordable, workforce, and mixed-income housing. The development will have 217 units of housing through two buildings, which will be affordable to households earning 50 to 100 percent average median income.

There will also be between 25,000 and 30,000 square feet for community space and social services. These would include St. Katharine Drexel Parish and its programs, such as the food pantry and the Sister Mary Hart Children's Program, as well as other organizations with ties to the parish, like Action for Boston Community Development, the Timothy Smith Network, and the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.

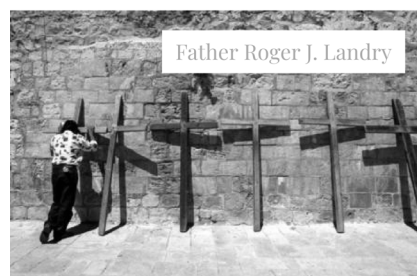
"The approach was really to build off of the parish's legacy of service and community," Grogan said.

Drexel Village will also create a variety of economic opportunities for the local community. The development team will match the savings of residents to help them build their assets, and homeownership housing units will enable families to build wealth and equity through real estate. Local businesses will be able to lease space at a subsidized rate. There will also be programs for job training and financial education, to help residents and other community members increase their financial sustainability.

The development will have about one-and-a-half acres of open space, with areas for public art tying in with the Nubian Square community. The proposal includes plans to preserve 35 existing trees, plant 65 new ones, and create a rooftop garden that will foster urban agriculture and support the parish's food pantry. There is also a cultural celebration plan to honor the neighborhood's history and commemorate iconic community leaders.

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"I think it's a unique development that ties the design and the community-based objectives together," Grogan said.

He said they hope to begin construction in two years, after they have gone through the permitting process and secured financing for the project.

"We look forward to working with the development team to bring life to the community's vision," Golden said.

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