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Salem affordable-housing project gets \$6m

By Sean Teehan, Town Correspondent

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Construction on a project to build affordable housing units at a closed Salem church could begin late in the summer after the Patrick administration announced yesterday the project will receive \$6 million in state and federal funding.

The funds came as part of a \$71.37 million dollar investment in affordable housing projects in 21 communities across the state, a statement released yesterday from the Patrick administration said.

"This is the big piece of funding we've been waiting for," said Lisa Alberghini, president of the nonprofit Planning Office of Urban Affairs, Inc., the Salem project's developer.

The plan is to build 51 affordable housing units, six of which will be reserved for extremely low-income families, Alberghini said. The project will generate 101 jobs, according to a projection from the Patrick administration.

The Planning Office of Urban Affairs, which is affiliated with the Archdioceses of Boston, bought the 2.6 acre property in 2005, after the church closed the previous year.

"We have been working with the commonwealth and the city for a number of years," Alberghini said.

Initially, the project set out to use the first floor of the church as a senior center, with condominium units above, but lawsuits for that and several other inceptions slowed progress.

"I call this project the little engine that could," Mayor Kimberley Driscoll said in an interview yesterday. "This is workforce housing, this is going to be for people who have trouble affording some of the units in Salem and Greater Boston."

Salem Common Neighborhood Association vice chair Lucy Corchado expressed delight about the funding yesterday.

"I always thought there was a need for affordable housing in the area," Corchado said. "We're home to the university and home to North Shore Medical Center, so there are people who want to live in Salem, but can't."

The Planning Office for Urban Affairs will receive \$1,237,500 in federal low-income housing tax credits, \$242,385 in state issued low-income housing tax credits, and \$4,500,000 in Department of Housing and Community Development program subsidies.

Construction is slotted to begin in late summer or early fall, Alberghini said.