

# The Union: MHP grants help put POUA, St. Francis House together

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**Boston Strong: The Union groundbreaking was a who's who of state and local leaders.**

BOSTON --- The groundbreaking for 46 low-income apartments in pricey downtown Boston wasn't just a chance to witness how seriously Greater Boston's leadership views ending homelessness, but also an opportunity to note the efforts MHP has made to help the state foster partnerships between housing developers like the Archdiocese's Planning Office for Urban Affairs(POUA) and social service providers like St. Francis House.

The dignitaries at the groundbreaking of The Union at 48 Boylston Street on Jan. 16 was a who's who of Boston leadership – Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Governor Charlie Baker, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, Secretary of State William Galvin, Miceal Chamberlain, Massachusetts President for Bank of America and Chrystal Kornegay, the Baker Administration's housing undersecretary.

“Creating affordable housing for working families, low-income senior citizens, and the homeless is a top priority for our administration,” said Governor Baker. “We look forward to the important housing resources St. Francis House and the Archdiocese will create with the City of Boston through this project.”

**Right Across street from St. Francis HQ**

POUA and St. Francis House are redeveloping the historic Young Men's Christian Union building into 46 apartments – 26 for those who are currently or have been homeless and 20 for residents with incomes at or below \$43,440 per year. The building was founded in the mid-1800s as a health club for “self-improvement and healthful recreation.” The building still has an extremely narrow basketball court.

The property is right across the street from St. Francis' main facility at 39 Boylston Street, which provides services for an average of 500 poor and homeless men and women per day, and offers 56 apartments for the homeless on floors 7-10. In addition to the new housing, the new space at 48 Boylston will allow St. Francis House to move some of its administrative offices there, creating more room for service programs at its main headquarters.

“Five years ago St. Francis House and the Urban Planning Office embarked on a partnership that is truly remarkable,” said Karen LaFrazia, president and CEO of St. Francis House. “I learned developing affordable housing is not for the faint of heart. It takes talent, determination and most of all an unwavering commitment to social justice.”

**MHP grants brought POUA, St. Francis together**

Two grants by MHP's Community Assistance team helped pave the way to the partnership between POUA and St. Francis House. In 2010, MHP awarded POUA a \$35,000 grant so it could explore partnerships with service providers and identify potential sites for development. This enabled POUA to discuss partnerships with service providers throughout Greater Boston and led to its relationship with St. Mary's Center for Women and Children, which is providing on-site services to residents at POUA's 80-unit Upham's Crossing development in Dorchester. This project includes 20 units for formerly homeless families coming from shelters. POUA was one of four organizations to receive grants between \$30,000 and \$50,000 aimed at encouraging innovative partnerships between developers and service providers.

In 2012, MHP provided POUA with an additional \$25,000 grant so it could team with St. Francis House to explore the feasibility of acquiring and redeveloping 48 Boylston St. The funds helped pay for zoning analysis, initial design work, market research, financial modeling and ownership structure scenarios.

“After the Massachusetts Homeless Commission recommended a shift in resources from shelters to permanent housing, we felt the most efficient and effective way to achieve more housing for the homeless was to promote partnerships between developers and service providers,” said Susan Connelly, director of MHP’s community assistance team. “From the outset, POUA was an active and enthusiastic participant in our meetings with developers and service providers, and we think The Union is a model of how partnerships can work to create more permanent housing for the homeless.”

**MHP played a key early role in bringing POUA and St. Francis House together, and all the quasis did their part.**

Once POUA and St. Francis had a plan, the next step was getting the money. Financing for The Union is being provided primarily through federal and state low-income tax credits awarded by the state Department of Housing and Community Development, as well as historic tax credits awarded by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Bank of America is providing construction financing and is also the tax credit investor. Eastern Bank is participating with Bank of America on the construction financing and is providing the permanent financing with a subsidized advance from the Federal Home Loan Bank. Additional financial supporters include the City of Boston, the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation, and MassHousing.

“We appreciate MHP’s guidance and support to help us explore potential partnerships with service providers in order to develop more permanent housing for the homeless,” said Lisa Alberghini, POUA’s president. “We thank MHP for helping us get The Union off the ground and we thank all our funders for helping us bring stability, opportunity, independence and hope to the poor and the homeless.”

For more information about MHP's community and technical assistance support, email Susan Connelly at [sconnelly@mhp.net](mailto:sconnelly@mhp.net).