

Development at St. Kevin's seen as 'anchor' for the district

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St. Mary's Women and Children's Center and two other groups are forging ahead with redevelopment plans for the former St. Kevin's school property in Uphams Corner, seeking to turn the 2.7-acre site into a mix of affordable housing and retail space. Construction could start next year.

A partnership of three organizations is in charge of the property, including the St. Mary's Center, Holy Family Parish, and a nonprofit real estate developer tied to the Boston archdiocese. They are also attempting to buy a city-owned lot, totaling 7,300 square feet, that sits on the same block next to the property.

The new buildings and retail space will be an "anchor" for the local business district, according to Lisa Alberghini, president of the archdiocese's Planning Office of Urban Affairs. The partnership is undertaking traffic and engineering studies, a financial analysis, and a design study.

The planning remains in the preliminary stage, but an update on the proposed conversion generated a warm response from a small group of local residents who last week attended a meeting put together to gather input on the plans. Another meeting is scheduled for July 29 at 6:30 p.m. at the Cape Verdean Adult Day Care Center on Hancock St.

St. Kevin's was founded in 1945 and closed in 2008 as the archdiocese moved to create the Pope John Paul II Academy system at other sites in the city. The property includes buildings at 35 Bird St., 516 Columbia Rd., and 570 Columbia Rd. The school building at 516 Columbia Rd. will be preserved.

Partnership officials laid out several options to local residents, including one preliminary plan that adds a floor to 516 Columbia Rd., and new buildings at the other two addresses. At 570 Columbia Rd., the proposed five-story building would have commercial space on the ground floor, 59,000 square feet total, and 48 housing units, while at 35 Bird St., a new building would take up 12,000 square feet, 2.5 stories, and have 12 units. Under that plan, there would be 50 parking spaces on the block. Other plans varied on whether to do any major work at all, or where to offer access: Davern St. or Virginia St.

"They listened," said Robert Haas, president of the Uphams Corner West Side Neighborhood Association and one of the 16 people who attended the meeting. "I don't want to see the property sit there and I don't want to see anything inappropriate done."

That's the reason Uphams Corner residents organized the St. Kevin's Area Planning Collaborative, he said. Haas is also a member of the board of directors of the Uphams Corner Main Street group.

Stating that they are adhering to the collaborative's "guiding principles," partnership officials say the neighborhood's planning effort helped them lay the groundwork for their own plans for the property.

The guiding principles include keeping the site open through multiple access points, "appropriate" parking, and maximizing green space.

The affordable housing apartments will be available to households making an income of up to \$63,000, and will likely include residents who are surveyors, lab technicians, social workers, paralegals, EMTs, and security guards, according to Alberghini.

Eighty percent of the units will be two-bedroom apartments, while 15 percent will be one bedroom apartments.

Alberghini said the partnership is focusing on getting grant funding for the project this fall.