



Photo Credit: Andy Ryan

# Community Coming Together

Northeast real estate company redevelops historic building into low-income and homeless housing with significant political support

Beacon Communities LLC, in partnership with Mount Vernon Company and nonprofit service provider Pine Street Inn, recently opened a landmark affordable housing community in one of Boston's most expensive neighborhoods.

The 140 Clarendon project transformed a historic 13-story building into modern homes for both low-income and formerly homeless households in the Back Bay. The community is near public transit, community-serving retail and neighborhood amenities, giving underserved individuals access to opportunity in addition to safe, stable and service-supported housing.

But beyond the baseline of providing housing, 140 Clarendon is a lesson in partnership and leadership that, if replicated, could facilitate a tremendous housing push across the nation. Beacon's expertise paired with the political and financial support from the City of Boston and Massachusetts entities not only made the development possible but created a shining example of cooperation between public, private and nonprofit groups that share a unified housing goal.



**Beacon Communities LLC**

VP, Development :: Darcy L. Jameson | Location :: Boston, Massachusetts



### PRESERVING THE SPIRIT

The building that stands at 140 Clarendon Street was built in 1929 and used by YW Boston (formerly the YWCA) for almost 100 years. Prior to its sale, YW Boston used the building as a 66-room hotel, 118-unit apartment complex and nonprofit space. Just before COVID-19, the building was under contract to be sold to a hospitality operator, but the pandemic stalled the deal. At that point, Beacon and Mount Vernon Company came together to discuss ways to acquire and convert the building into affordable housing.

"It's part of the Back Bay, transit-oriented—[just] a really unique opportunity to advance the Y's mission. We'd be buying it from the Y, but to continue the spirit and also let their offices stay in the building. ..." says Darcy L. Jameson, Vice President of Development at Beacon Communities. "[We thought], could we make a meaningful run at acquiring this building to preserve the cultural and educational uses and create housing, specifically, that would really target the humanitarian crisis that we were experiencing in Boston and [that] many other cities are [facing] with people experiencing homelessness?"

By bringing Pine Street Inn—New England's largest homeless service provider—into the deal and engaging local and state leaders, the development team was successful in its acquisition. The \$130 million project involved the transformation of the hotel and apartment units into 210 studios and one-bedroom homes, 111 of which are reserved for people previously experiencing homelessness, and the balance serving households earning up to 50 percent AMI.

Amenities include a fitness center, community room and computer learning center. The building will also retain space for organizations that were already there, including the Lyric Stage Theater Company, the Snowden School and YW Boston's offices. Beacon's Community Engagement coordinators will facilitate resident programming on site, including wellness visits, food programs and community gatherings. Additionally, Pine Street Inn will maintain case management offices within the building to serve the residents who were previously experiencing homelessness.

Prellwitz Chilinski Associates was the project's architect, and NEI General Contracting served as

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#### MCPHAIL ASSOCIATES, LLC

McPhail takes pride in being part of the exceptional and skilled design team brought together by Beacon Communities to create affordable housing solutions at 140 Clarendon, Old Colony Housing, and throughout Greater Boston. Since 1976, McPhail has consistently applied a practical approach to complex projects, always prioritizing clients' best interests and supporting their visions for intelligent, inclusive, and sustainable communities. Recognizing housing stability as a fundamental human need, McPhail firmly believes that collaboration and pragmatic engineering solutions are the foundation for creating and ensuring stable housing for Massachusetts communities.

the redevelopment's contractor. Cambridge-based McPhail Associates provided geotechnical engineering services. Construction lasted around 20 months, and the team reached formal completion in December 2023.

#### COLLECTIVE EFFORT

The success of 140 Clarendon is almost entirely attributable to the teamwork and political leadership surrounding the project since its inception. Beacon and its partners pulled together many different sources of financing, including federal and state tax credits, federal historic tax credits, funds from the Mayor's Office of Housing and over \$58 million from MassHousing, the state's housing finance agency. The speed at which these funds were compiled demonstrates the unity of all parties in supporting this project.

"I think the big takeaway for this project is the political leadership. We had support at all levels.

Everyone from the Mayor's Office of Housing, to the mayor, to the state housing agencies understood the urgency of this moving forward and helped problem-solve from macro to micro," Jameson says. "Whether we were talking about fair housing issues [or] tenant selection plans, there was political leadership across the landscape to make this happen."

"This was a truly collaborative effort between Beacon Communities, our state and city partners and private partners to create this important affordable housing in one of the city's most expensive markets for rental housing," says MassHousing CEO, Chrystal Kornegay. "MassHousing was pleased to be part of this transformative project that created 210 new affordable apartment homes in the heart of the Back Bay, with more than 100 units for formerly homeless individuals, with the building also remaining home to the YWCA, Lyric Stage Theater Company, the Snowden School and the retail businesses and restaurants there."

This tremendous political support also set the tone for community acceptance, which was aided by Beacon and its partners actively engaging the community throughout planning and design.

"One of the things that was interesting was we had a lot of neighborhood support for this. One of the really thoughtful comments that came from residents in the neighborhood during the community process was, 'Many of these people who are experiencing homelessness are already living in our neighborhood. They're living on the street in our neighborhood. So, we're excited that there will be a building and a project that, at a meaningful scale, keeps people in the neighborhood but off the street,'" says Jameson. "That was incredibly powerful to hear neighbors with that sort of self-awareness. Instead of just saying, 'We don't want this here,' it's like, 'Everyone's already here. Now they'll be in this building [and] they'll be cared for.'"

With everyone from Back Bay neighbors to Massachusetts state agencies on board, 140 Clarendon got the green light to assist in Boston's affordable housing crisis. Over 200 households now enjoy safe, affordable housing thanks to this collective effort. 🏡

