



The new Old Colony: Planning and creating a sustainable-housing resource

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A case-study synopsis of the RDC workshop B5, Thursday, April 28, 5:30–7:00 pm

In mid-November 2010, Boston city officials approved \$84 million for Phase Two of the Old Colony housing redevelopment project in South Boston. This followed an award in March 2010 of \$22 million for Phase One from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) competitive grants to fund environmentally sustainable public-housing transformation work across the country.

Old Colony is among the most physically distressed sites in the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) federal portfolio, with aged systems and infrastructure, and an annual energy and water cost of more than \$4,000 per unit. The site—one of BHA's largest—spreads across more than 16 acres, providing 873 apartments within 22 look-alike, three-story brick walk-ups.

Yet the redevelopment aims to do more than rejuvenate a large urban site. In line with the ARRA grant, Phase One will introduce several ambitious green-building and energy-efficiency measures. Old Colony will be among the first affordable-housing projects in the region to strive for a net-zero-energy-use profile in accordance with Enterprise Green Building, the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star and HUD Healthy Homes Guidelines, and is being tracked in multiple LEED programs to include LEED for Homes for the townhomes, LEED for Homes Midrise for the midrise, LEED NC (new construction) for the community center, and the overall project is being designed in accordance with LEED ND (neighborhood development).

The project is by no means experimental; it relies on proven methods for green building, housing planning and neighborhood development. The masterplan and designs for individual buildings take advantage of best practices in affordable-housing development and respond to Old Colony's deep history, recent funding and the political environment. The project is a model for the use of ARRA stimulus funds—as it's replacing distressed affordable housing, and creating jobs and green development. An unexpected benefit involves teachers in the neighboring Perkins Elementary School who are leveraging the project's proximity and using the redevelopment as an educational tool for students.

Planning for future phases began in parallel with Phase One's urban and architectural design, with many overarching design concepts created to accommodate subsequent phases. The redevelopment involves the demolition of seven dilapidated structures to make room for five new residential buildings yielding 116 affordable units in a variety of building types, and a new community center that will offer residents social services. Construction started in fall 2010 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2011.

This major urban design will bring together a variety of aesthetic, environmental and urban-planning best practices for the benefit of a large endemic population. The development team for Old Colony includes the BHA and Beacon Communities Development (developers), The Architectural Team (project architect) and Suffolk Construction (construction manager). Transportation and permitting consultants are, respectively, Vanasse & Associates and Epsilon Associates.

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