

## New Life for Boston's Old Colony

The redevelopment of the U.S.'s oldest public affordable housing development combines sustainable design with new neighborhood amenities

By: Jennifer Goodman



*Photo Credit: Andy Ryan*

A redevelopment project encompassing an innovative master plan and sustainable building techniques has begun to breathe new life into South Boston's Old Colony affordable housing development.

Over the years, the 70-year-old community had become a symbol of poor housing conditions for the city's low-income residents. The 17-acre development, the oldest public housing in the country, was badly in need of a face-lift.

Stemming from a grant for "environmentally sustainable public housing transformation" awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), redevelopment plans began in 2009. The revamped neighborhood plan and energy-efficient, high-performing residences and community facilities were designed to turn the Homes at Old Colony into a national model for sustainable multifamily design and desirable urban living.

Phase I, completed in December 2011, included 116 LEED-Platinum housing units divided among a six-story midrise residential building and four groups of townhouses topped with photovoltaic panels. Phase I also included a 10,000-square-foot learning center awarded LEED-NC Gold. This part of the project won an Affordable Housing Finance Readers' Choice Award in 2012.

Also planned for LEED-Platinum are the 129 units of Phase II completed last month, and 40 more to be added next year. Old Colony is designed to EPA's Energy Star and HUD Healthy Homes Guidelines, and the revitalized site anticipates a LEED for Neighborhood Development certification.

"The buildings are oriented to maximize solar exposure, with carefully designed exterior envelopes that significantly reduce heating and air-conditioning loads," says Jay Szymanski, project architect and associate at Chelsea, Mass.-based The Architectural Team. The homes feature

energy-efficient mechanical systems, appliances, and lighting as well as recycled-content and healthy materials. “Old Colony’s redevelopment also incorporates new policies to limit waste and improve indoor air quality,” he adds.

Other sustainable design features include:

- Permeable concrete pavers
- Efficient irrigation systems
- Low-flow plumbing fixtures
- High-performing water pipe insulation
- Low-VOC flooring, sealants, and paints
- Locally produced aggregate and drywall