



# Groundbreaking for long-sought Fenway Center complex takes on air of a celebration



LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

**Audience members applauded speakers at the groundbreaking for Fenway Center, a high-profile project along the Massachusetts Turnpike.**

By [Tim Logan](#)

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Every groundbreaking is a celebration. But a groundbreaking Tuesday alongside the Massachusetts Turnpike was more celebratory than most.

It began with Governor Charlie Baker striding in to a Dropkick Murphys tune, high-fiving Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack, and hugging developer John Rosenthal. It ended with Rosenthal shaking hands outside in the cold, including a friend who told him the event felt a bit like a wedding. And throughout it had the feel of a party people had been waiting to attend for a very long time.

They had been.

Developers, politicians, construction workers, and Rosenthal's many friends jammed into a heated tent on a snowy morning to celebrate the start of work on Fenway Center, the massive complex along and above the Massachusetts Turnpike that Rosenthal has been pushing to build for a decade and a half.

Finally, in early January, Rosenthal and his partners at development firm Gerding Edlen started work on a \$240 million Phase 1, a pair of apartment buildings that will rise along Beacon Street and the Yawkey commuter rail station.

"I had my moments when I wasn't quite sure this day would come," Rosenthal said. "This has been a 15-year journey to get to this point."

After sparring with the Menino administration, negotiating with state officials, and winning over skeptical financiers, construction feels like "the easy part," he said.

Crews have already started digging out the site for the two apartment buildings, with 312 units in all, plus retail and a pedestrian plaza along Yawkey Station. They're scheduled to open in late 2019.

Meanwhile, Rosenthal, Gerding Edlen, and Pollack are talking about Phase 2, the piece of the project that would build a deck over the Massachusetts Turnpike next door, and on top of that a 27-story tower of housing and office space and a new garage. Starting Phase 1 should help build momentum — both on Beacon Hill and among investors — for the more-complex second phase, said Kelly Saito, managing partner at Gerding Edlen.



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**Boston Arts Academy's Spirituals Ensemble performed at the groundbreaking.**

“Everybody is motivated right now,” he said. “Everybody wants to carry this momentum forward.”

Breaking the project in two was key to making it happen, Pollack said, and could unlock the first successful development over the Pike in nearly four decades. Her agency and the developers are working through the logistics of building over the busy highway, without interrupting traffic, and she hopes they can use Fenway Center as a road map for more air rights projects to come.

“We’re definitely learning things with this one,” she said.

And that, she hopes, could spark more celebrations in tents along the Turnpike in the future.



THE ARCHITECTURE TEAM

**The \$500 million Fenway Center project would include five new buildings with apartments, offices, stores and a parking garage on property near the historic ballpark. A new commuter rail station is already under construction on the site.**

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