

TaxCreditAdvisor

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NATIONAL HOUSING & REHABILITATION ASSOCIATION

Keeping Affordable and Middle-Income Housing on Track

Transit-Oriented Development in Jamaica Plain, Boston

IN THIS ISSUE:

Guidance for the Gray Areas of the Four Percent Fix

Pivoting from Pandemic to Endemic

To Deduct or Depreciate? That is the Question

A.O. Flats, Boston, MA

Photo by Bruce Martin

CASE STUDY:

A.O. Flats in Boston

Affordable and Workforce Units Mix in Jamaica Plain *By Mark Fogarty*

A.O. Flats, a Greater Boston housing development that takes its name from two local landmarks (A for Arborway from the Arnold Arboretum and O for Orange from the Orange transit line), itself will be a blend of two types of residences. Both affordable and workforce housing residents are putting down roots in the Boston neighborhood of Jamaica Plain just a short commuter ride from center city.

Eight subsidized units will house formerly homeless tenants at 30 percent or less of area median income (AMI), while 32 tax credit units will go to those at or below 60 percent AMI. The remaining 40 apartments are workforce, or middle income, housing for people earning up to 120 percent of AMI.

The apartments include eight studios, 37 one-bedroom units, 25 two-bedroom and eight three-bedroom homes. The \$35 million development was opened in September of last year. Bilt-Rite Construction of Boston was the general contractor.

New York-based developer The Community Builders commissioned The Architectural Team of Chelsea, MA for the complex design of the rental units, which are one part of a multi-phase development, including adjacent homeownership units.

The financing of the building (see Capital Sources) included tax credit equity from the Royal Bank of Canada, says Andrew Waxman, regional vice president for real estate development at TCB. Other sources included the city of Boston, MassHousing and a sponsor loan from The Community Builders.

Having a wide mix of income levels is something TCB looks to do in a project, he says. In addition to the housing, there is around 2,000 square feet of commercial space at A.O. Flats, which may be rented to professionals, such as a veterinarian.

Nonprofit agency HomeStart made the referrals for the formerly homeless tenants, working with the Department of Neighborhood Development, the city unit responsible



Photo by Bruce Martin

A.O. Flats in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, MA, is a transit-oriented development (TOD).

for housing the homeless. Its Supportive Housing Division works with various partners around the city to rapidly house individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

Working on the Railroad

TCB is currently doing another transit-oriented development (TOD) project along the Orange Line, Waxman says, at the Jackson Square station. A.O. Flats is adjacent to the Forest Hills station of the Orange Line.

Gary M. Kane, principal at TAT (Stephen K. Chung was the associated design architect on the project), says that A.O. Flats is a TOD located “just beyond the last subway stop on the Orange Line in Jamaica Plain.” The line is run by the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA), which also used to own the parcel of land on which the project is built.

Kane says the project, now fully occupied, is also near an above-ground commuter line that goes right past A.O. Flats, which is built on a long, thin strip of land adjacent to the tracks and to a condo homeownership development on its other side.

The construction type for A.O. Flats is commonly referred to as a “podium building,” Kane explains. That is a predominantly wood structure sitting atop a non-combustible base. Five stories of wood are allowed on top of podiums, one, two and now even three stories.

The lowest level includes a parking garage, though since the development is so close to the transit line a parking to apartment ratio of just over 0.5 was more than enough, Kane says. The City of Boston pro-actively requires one bike space per apartment and this garage level incorporates a spacious and secure room adjacent to the elevator lobby.

Architectural Challenge

“The site was complicated as there was a very steep drop off from the main street, which is Hyde Park Avenue, to the train line. There was a retaining wall supporting the viaduct. We ended up having to make a deep excavation because we could not change the grading and loading conditions on the existing retaining wall, which is owned and managed by the MBTA and Amtrak,” he says.

“There were a lot of complexities working around the transit line. We also had some existing storm and sewer infrastructure owned by the city of Boston and the MBTA. The building had to span over the infrastructure and delicately work around the existing pipes so we could place the building without disturbing these elements.

“The design is predominantly a long linear building. This massing is organized with two distinct elements. The end nearing the train station and facing down Hyde Park Avenue is designed with a larger, commercial scale, giving it a more urban and civic presence,” Brown says.

“The remainder of the building as it runs down Hyde Park Avenue takes on a more residential feel. The building is designed with living room bays that jut out, in sawtooth fashion, above the ground level apartments that have direct entrances from the sidewalk,” Kane says. “We wanted to create a pedestrian experience more in keeping with the residential homes across the street.”

Open Space for Residents

In other design elements at the 84,000 square foot community, according to The Architectural Team, “A second egress from the first floor opens to a new pocket park that is available to the public. With more than 2,500 square feet of community space, amenities for tenants include a fitness room, a common lounge, a top floor deck, outdoor play area and a dog walk.

“Lively and inviting interior spaces are informed and inspired by proximate landmarks. The hexagonal shape is a unifying design element, complemented by the custom tile pattern in the lobby, which artfully interprets the

CAPITAL SOURCES

\$2.25 million in Department of Neighborhood Development funding.

\$750,000 in Neighborhood Housing Trust Funds.

\$8.1 million in MassHousing Workforce funding.

\$13.09 million in MassHousing permanent funding.

\$8.84 million in equity (Low Income Housing Tax Credit and Solar).

\$2.6 million sponsor loan from The Community Builders.

topography of Harvard University’s Arnold Arboretum. A palette of gold, teal and chartreuse combine with black metal accents, colorful artwork, warm toned wood and touches of gray.”

Other features include an elevator, central air conditioning, on-site laundry facilities and direct access to the newly created pocket park.

Chrystal Kornegay, executive director of MassHousing, says the agency contributed a total of \$27.4 million in financing, including \$8.1 million in Workforce Housing Initiative funding, \$13.1 million in construction and permanent financing and a \$6.19 million bridge loan.

The agency set out to construct 1,000 units of rental workforce housing a few years ago and has surpassed that number and is keeping going.

“A.O. Flats has checked the boxes of the things we like to see with new housing development,” says Kornegay. “TCB transformed an underutilized MBTA parcel near a vibrant subway station and created 78 new rental homes for households with a range of incomes, making it a true mixed-income housing community.”

Both TAT’s Kane and TCB’s Waxman note the energy efficiency and sustainability features of the project, which achieved a LEED Platinum Certifiable level through the City of Boston’s Article 37 program. **TCA**

STORY CONTACTS:

Gary M. Kane, Principal, The Architectural Team, Chelsea, Mass.
gkane@architecturalteam.com

Andrew Waxman, Regional Vice President, Real Estate,
The Community Builders, Boston
andrew.waxman@tcbinc.org

Chrystal Kornegay, Executive Director, MassHousing, Boston
ckornegay@masshousing.com