

MAYOR MICHELLE WU ANNOUNCES TRANSFORMATIVE REDEVELOPMENT OF BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY'S WEST END BRANCH TO INCLUDE HOUSING

The City of Boston has tentatively designated the development team to rebuild the West End Branch of the Boston Public Library and create 119 new units of income-restricted housing

Last updated: December 13, 2023

Mayor Michelle Wu, the Mayor's Office of Housing, and the Boston Public Library (BPL) announced that the City of Boston's Public Facilities Commission has tentatively designated the development team of Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) and Caste Capital to redevelop the West End branch of the Boston Public Library on Cambridge Street. The renovation will include a new two-story branch library and 119 income-restricted units of housing above the library through the Housing with Public Assets initiative, an innovative new program designed to maximize the use of municipal properties for the public good.

"The Mayor's Office of Housing is very appreciative of both the Beacon Hill and West End communities. They were supportive of combining housing with a new branch library and have played an active role in shaping the RFP and associated design criteria," said **Chief Sheila Dillon**. "The response to the RFP was significant, with many talented development teams submitting high-quality proposals. We look forward to working with POAH, Caste Capital, and the community to shape this development proposal."

The chosen development team was designated by the Public Facilities Commission for their experience in sustainable and community-centric development projects. The proposed project involves transforming the parcel into a mixed-use development with 119 transit-oriented, income-restricted apartments above the library space, along with open space and amenities for library visitors, building residents, and the public. The goal of the project is not only to expand the library's size and offerings, but also to address the growing demand to create more income-restricted housing. The development team will prioritize community input, including the needs and preferences of residents, to create an inclusive environment for all. The new building will be all-electric and designed to minimize the carbon footprint of both the housing and library, in alignment with the City of Boston's climate goals and commitment to sustainability.

"POAH has been invested in the West End since 2012 when we acquired The Blackstone Apartments, a key senior affordable housing resource in a rapidly developing neighborhood," said **Aaron Gornstein, President and CEO of Preservation of Affordable Housing**

(POAH). “We are excited to further expand access to affordable housing in a neighborhood of opportunity that once housed generations of diverse, lower-income Bostonians. The new development at 151 Cambridge Street will be a community resource, underpinned by a re-envisioned library and a sustainable, intergenerational affordable housing community.”

The 119 units of affordable housing will include a mix of bedroom sizes, from studios to three-bedroom units. The high proportion of family-sized units in this proposal was a key factor in its selection and a key community objective for the development. Of the 119 residences, 40 apartments will be affordable to households earning up to 30 percent of Area Median Income (AMI), and 79 apartments will be designated for households earning up to 80 percent of AMI.

"The West End Library project will not only revitalize the West End and Beacon Hill neighborhoods but also leave a lasting impact on the entire Greater Boston community, said **Patrick Kimble, Founder and Managing Partner for Caste Capital**. “Through our partnership with the Mayor’s Office of Housing and the Boston Public Library to develop a new library branch and much-needed affordable housing supply, we aim to combat the pressing affordable housing crisis that impacts countless Boston residents from diverse backgrounds. This endeavor represents our unwavering commitment to creating a public asset that uplifts and empowers individuals from all walks of life. Together, we will shape a brighter future for Boston, where everyone has access to quality housing and vital educational resources.”

Twenty of the most deeply affordable apartments will be created using a dedicated subsidy, in partnership with the Boston Housing Authority, that allows new public housing to be built. The new development will also include a courtyard, multiple residential amenity spaces, and a shared plaza with the neighboring Otis House museum, library, and archives.

The new development will result in a new, two-floor branch library – approximately 70 percent larger than the size of the current branch – to serve the West End community. The design of the new space will be informed by a comprehensive [programming study](#), which was carried out by the BPL in conjunction with the City’s Public Facilities Department, the Mayor’s Office of Housing, and Ann Beha Architects. The study identified potential new additions to the branch’s offerings, including a new community room, a space reserved for teens, an updated outdoor space, and a learning lab, along with updated technology and audio-visual capabilities.

“As library leaders, we are charged to use all of our resources to serve the public. I can think of no higher level of public service than to co-locate a public library and its critical offerings together with affordable housing,” said **David Leonard, President of the Boston Public Library**. “In continued partnership with the Mayor’s Office of Housing, we are also looking forward to additional projects that co-locate library services with housing, including in Upham’s Corner and Chinatown. The Housing with Public Assets initiative uses current City-owned land to its highest and best use, and we are extremely proud to be a part of it.”

The Boston Public Library and Mayor’s Office of Housing, along with the Public Facilities Department and other City departments, co-hosted nine public meetings to set clear expectations for what a mixed-use building at this location could be. The participation of multiple community groups, including the West End Civic Association, Beacon Hill Civic Association, Historic New

England, and others was essential to laying out a compelling vision. All told, eight different applicants responded to the Request for Proposals, demonstrating the rare and exciting opportunity to deliver multiple public benefits to the neighborhood. All the respondents presented their designs to the community over the summer, with extensive public input factoring into the evaluation and selection.

“The BHCA is very excited to see this important project move to its next phase,” said **Meghan Awe, Chair of the Beacon Hill Civic Association**. “Converting the West End Library to a mixed-use building with affordable housing was hatched by three former leaders of BHCA. The BHCA has long been a strong supporter of this project and appreciates the spirit of transparency and thoughtful collaboration that the City has displayed through Senior Development Officer, Joe Backer of the Mayor’s Office of Housing. The BHCA looks forward to continuing to work with the City and seeing the project through to completion.”

“The West End Civic Association appreciates the work that went into selecting a developer for the West End Library, including the extensive community input included during this phase of the process,” said **Sebastian A. Belfanti, President of the West End Civic Association**. “We are pleased that the City selected a project the Association's Board and planning committee approved of, and are excited to see how the project develops from this point. We look forward to continuing clear and open public dialogue as this innovative project moves forward.”

The City’s [Housing With Public Assets](#) program seeks to build low- and moderate- income housing above municipal assets. The program explores ways to build housing above City properties such as libraries, police stations, fire stations, and parking lots, as a way to maximize the utility of those locations while maintaining and improving the core functions of those properties. The program is one of many initiatives spearheaded by the Mayor’s Office of Housing and the Housing Innovation Lab in recent years to address the housing crisis, including the [Acquisition Opportunity Program](#), the [Additional Dwelling Unit Program](#), and the [Future Decker initiative](#).

“We applaud Mayor Wu's innovative strategy to maximize city resources and return desperately needed affordable housing to the West End, while forming an important cultural and civic anchor in the neighborhood,” said **Vin Cipolla, President and CEO of Historic New England**. “We are so grateful to the City for its collaborative approach, which will have such a positive impact on the neighborhood through culture, community, and meaningful partnerships.”

The tentative designation to redevelop the West End branch of the Boston Public Library aligns Mayor Wu’s commitment to the principles of smart growth and transit-oriented development in Boston. In the fiscal year 2023, the Mayor allocated substantial resources to address housing challenges in the city. A substantial portion of the \$200 million committed from ARPA funds has been designated for diverse housing initiatives, including affordable homeownership development, strategic acquisitions to combat displacement, energy retrofits for multifamily homes, permanent supportive housing with specialized services, and upgrades to Boston Housing Authority properties.

For more information and updates on the West End Library development, visit the City of Boston [website](#).

About the Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH)

The Mayor's Office of Housing is responsible for housing people experiencing homelessness, creating and preserving affordable housing, and ensuring that renters and homeowners can obtain, maintain, and remain in safe, stable housing. The department develops and implements the City of Boston's housing creation and homelessness prevention plans and collaborates with local and national partners to find new solutions and build more housing affordable to all, particularly those with lower incomes. For more information, please visit the MOH [website](#).

About the Boston Public Library

Established in 1848, the Boston Public Library is a pioneer of public library service in America. It was the first large, free municipal library in the United States; the first public library to lend books; the first to have a branch library; and the first to have a children's room.

The Boston Public Library of today is a robust system that includes the Central Library in Copley Square, 25 neighborhood branches, the Norman B. Leventhal Map and Education Center, the Kirstein Business Library and Innovation Center, and an archival center, offering public access to world-class special collections of rare books, manuscripts, photographs, and prints, along with rich digital content and online services.

The Boston Public Library serves nearly 4 million visitors per year and millions more online. All of its programs and exhibitions are free to all and open to the public. The Boston Public Library is a department of the City of Boston, under the leadership of Mayor Michelle Wu. To learn more, visit bpl.org.