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City of Boston approves first phase of \$2 billion redevelopment

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Caption

Boston, MA WinnCompanies and the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) will begin in 2024 on the \$2 billion redevelopment of the Mary Ellen McCormack public housing complex under a two-phase master plan to build 3,300 mixed-income apartments on the 30-acre site, including the replacement of all 1,016 public housing units with a guaranteed right to return for current residents.

This follows the approval by the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) of the Phase One Development Plan for the South Boston property, which was the first public housing community in New England. The BPDA vote capped two-and-a-half years of design review by the city of Boston and clears the way for final permitting of the massive, historically significant project.

Under the \$776 million Phase One plan ratified by the BPDA, 1,310 apartments will be created in eight new residential buildings that will be built over the course of eight years, replacing 529 obsolete apartments for BHA households, and creating 781 new apartment homes for middle income and market rate renters.

In addition, WinnCompanies will spend \$110 million on public infrastructure improvements to better connect Mary Ellen McCormack with the surrounding neighborhood through a revamped street grid, new utilities and parks, and long-term climate resiliency measures.

“We’re ecstatic to finally get to the point where we can look forward to the start of construction. The new buildings and community will be beautiful,” said Carol Sullivan, president of the Mary Ellen McCormack tenant task force.

“Winn and the BHA have put the residents first in every aspect of planning during the past six and half years. Our input has shaped everything from the relocation plan, the services we need, the retail choices, and security. Just being able to shop for basics in the community will make a big difference in residents’ lives. We can’t wait to get started.”

“Boston’s public housing residents deserve the best, and this redevelopment will give them an enhanced, resilient community in which to thrive while welcoming new neighbors,” said BHA Administrator Kenzie Bok. “We are proud of the many generations of Bostonians who have called Mary Ellen McCormack home, and of the current residents who have co-designed its future with BHA and Winn. Thank you to Mayor Michelle Wu, BPDA Chief Arthur Jemison, and so many partners who have been supporting this project every step of the way.”

In partnership with the YMCA of Greater Boston, WinnCompanies and the Tenant Task Force will also begin coordinating unprecedented programs and supportive services for residents, offering early education and after-school programs, healthcare services, workforce development and senior home care.

“This will be the largest development project in company history and will produce a modern, inclusive, mixed-income neighborhood – a community of opportunity that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable for the long term,” said WinnCompanies CEO Gilbert Winn. “We appreciate the BPDA’s guidance, the support of all of our public, private and nonprofit partners and, most of all, the patience and faith that Mary Ellen McCormack residents have shown in our shared vision for the community’s bright future.”

Built during the Great Depression and opened in 1938, the community consists of 22 three-story, brick buildings and 152 direct-entry row houses. In addition to being physically isolated from the surrounding neighborhood, the apartments fall well short of modern standards, with no handicapped accessibility, no in-unit or common laundry facilities, no amenities, and inadequate infrastructure and security.

Under the revitalization plan, new residential buildings will be built, and existing buildings will be demolished, in phases as part of a complex relocation strategy choreographed to allow as many of the existing households as possible to move directly into new apartments.

To facilitate and prioritize direct moves, a 94-unit apartment building will be the first erected. Since 4 out of 10 households in the community consist of individuals aged 62 or older, a 172-unit building offering a range of supportive and community services for seniors will also be among the first built.

A minimum of 20% of the apartments in the remaining six Phase One buildings will be reserved for current public housing residents. Contingent on final funding awards, the project will create up to 90 new middle-income apartments and up to 736 new market-rate units. All apartments in any given building will have identical finishes, regardless of resident income.

Overall, Phase One construction will redevelop 18 acres of the Mary Ellen McCormack property, increasing open space by 73% with new pedestrian walking paths, separate bike infrastructure and gathering spaces. In addition, 33,000 s/f of ground-floor retail space will be created for local small businesses, including a grocery retailer. Twenty-five (25) percent of retail space will be offered at below-market leases.

Work could begin as early as June 2024, assuming the permitting and regulatory approvals.

Phase One funding from an array of city, state and federal agencies will help leverage more than \$780 million in private equity and debt. Financing will include more than \$191 million in equity from Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC); \$50 million from the city of Boston; appropriations from the state Legislature; and funding support from MassHousing, the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust (AFL-CIO HIT), and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities (EOHLC).

“The redevelopment of Mary Ellen McCormack directly addresses the greatest issues facing greater Boston – housing availability, costs and climate change,” said WinnDevelopment vce president of development Andrew Colbert, the day-to-day leader of the project. “Our community-informed plan integrating homes, public spaces, walkable streets, services, and retail businesses will encourage greater connectivity with the surrounding neighborhood. All aspects of the project incorporate resiliency measures into the design to adapt to the future climate conditions.”

Resident services will be overseen by Connected Communities, the social impact arm of WinnCompanies, in partnership with the YMCA and the Tenant Task Force, which will coordinate the efforts of a coalition comprised of dozens of local nonprofit service organizations. WinnResidential, the company’s property management arm, will operate the community on a day-to-day basis.

A 17,500 s/f community center, created through the adaptive reuse of the existing boiler plant on the site, will serve as the hub for resident support. Positioned next to a planned community green, the community center will be named for the late William “Billy” McGonagle, a former BHA Administrator who grew up at Mary Ellen McCormack and served BHA for 40 years.

With a first-of-its-kind research grant from the National Institutes of Health, Boston College, Harvard University and Boston University are partnering with WinnCompanies and the BHA to study the redevelopment over the course of five years. This innovative study will examine how the conversion into a mixed-income community with outcomes-focused supportive services can impact resident health, wellbeing, and economic mobility.

“This will be a successful redevelopment only if the families of Mary Ellen McCormack are successful because of it,” said WinnCompanies senior vice president Trevor Samios, who leads Connected Communities. “We are beyond excited to bring together a coalition of committed service providers for the long-term benefit of this community. We believe that when families have the right support, access to resources, and partners dedicated to their success, collective impact can achieve a meaningful, measurable difference in this revitalization.”

All eight of the Phase One apartment buildings will be high-performance, fully electric and built to Passive House standards, the most rigorous energy sustainability requirements in residential development. All will be ready for future solar energy installations. Because the Mary Ellen McCormack site is susceptible to current and future flooding from nearby Boston Harbor, construction work will raise the grades of the property by 5 to 7 feet and all new buildings will be constructed above the 2070 projected flooding scenario projected by Climate Ready Boston.

The project is expected to create more than 7,000 construction jobs and more than 100 permanent jobs in property management, retail offerings and community services.

City of Boston approvals for Phase Two of the master-planned redevelopment will be sought near the end of Phase One construction. The second phase is expected to produce 10 additional mixed-income apartment buildings on the remaining 12 acres of the property, featuring 487 replacement units for public housing residents and approximately 1,500 middle-income and market-rate units.

WinnCompanies was named developer of the project by the BHA and the Tenant Task Force in August 2017 following a competitive proposal process. It submitted its plan to the BPDA in June 2021 after three years and thousands of hours of engagement with the complex’s more than 2,000 residents about their needs and vision for the redevelopment, using hybrid and multilingual tools to reach historically excluded community voices.

The Tenant Task Force has had direct participation in shaping the management practices, security, eviction practices and operating policies for the new community. In addition, WinnCompanies’ staff

logged more than 3,000 hours at the Tenant Task Force building to meet one-on-one with residents.

The project enjoys unwavering support from U.S. Representative Stephen Lynch, who represents South Boston, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, and the neighborhood's elected city and state officials, including State Senator Nick Collins, State Representative David Biele, Boston City Council President Ed Flynn, and outgoing City Councilors Frank Baker and Michael Flaherty.

The development team assisting WinnDevelopment on Phase One community planning, design and permitting include the Boston-based design firm CBT; The Architectural Team of Chelsea, MA; Copley Wolff Design Group, a Boston-based landscape architect; the law firm of DLA Piper; retail consultant GraffitoSP of Boston; transportation consultant Howard Stein Hudson of Boston; VHB, a civil engineering firm based in Watertown, MA; New Ecology, a Boston-based sustainability consultant; historic consultant Public Archaeology Laboratory, based in Pawtucket, RI; McPhail Associates, an engineering consultant in Cambridge, MA; and Lee Kennedy Company, a construction estimating firm in Quincy, MA.

The Mary Ellen McCormack site is located across the street from a waterfront public park and beach and within walking distance of multiple modes of transit that connect the location to the heart of Boston and beyond, including commuter rail lines serving communities southeastern Massachusetts, as well as two subway stations serving downtown Boston, Cambridge and communities north of the city.

WinnCompanies' partnership with the BHA and Boston public housing residents reaches back nearly three decades, starting with its management of Eva White Apartments, a 102-unit elderly community in the South End. It also manages Faneuil Gardens, a 258-unit community in Brighton, and General Warren, a 95-unit elderly community in Charlestown.

WinnCompanies also partnered with the BHA to spearhead the 1998 redevelopment of Mission Main, a 535-unit mixed-income property in Mission Hill, and the 2021 redevelopment of Clippership Apartments in East Boston, which created 22 apartment homes for low- and extremely low-income households and 30 condominiums for ownership by middle-income and market-rate households.

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