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City set to break ground on Ferdinand project in Dudley Square

Posted by Matt Rocheleau February 24, 2012 09:09 AM

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(Boston Redevelopment Authority)

A rendering of the proposed redevelopment in Dudley Square.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Next weekend, exactly one year after the city announced a \$115-million plan to redevelop the long-abandoned Ferdinand department store and two adjacent buildings in Roxbury's Dudley Square, officials and residents will gather for a groundbreaking ceremony.

The city hopes to complete the project by 2014 and then relocate the Boston School Department's headquarters and its more than 450 school administration staff to the site in an effort to help revitalize the heart of Roxbury and regain the trust of its residents, who on multiple occasions have seen public officials renege promises for redevelopment there.

And, moving the city schools offices out of their current home on Court Street near City Hall will create needed room to execute a broader plan to consolidate nine municipal administrative facilities down to four, including moving the Fire

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line municipal administrative facilities down to four, including moving the Fire Department headquarters from Southampton Street to an upgraded space at 1010 Massachusetts Ave.

The old fire department nerve center would be among five city buildings that will be leased or sold under the proposal.

Revitalizing the five-story, 117-year-old Ferdinand Building in an effort to boost economic activity in Dudley Square, is a promise that has been made before by both city and state leaders.

After years of hearing from state and city leaders that the state's public health department would move its offices into the building that has sat empty for three decades, that \$60-million proposal was cancelled eight years ago.

Months later, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced the city would take over the building by eminent domain. The school department would relocate there, he promised. The city acquired the property in 2006. Two years later, a springtime ceremonial demolition event for the \$80-million idea was held and the mayor announced a design contest for the project. Amid an economic downturn, the project faded.

But, city officials have said the current [current project](#) has stronger footing in part because of a private-public partnership to help manage reconstruction of the site centered around the old Ferdinand building, a Baroque Revival structure flanked by Warren and Washington streets that features an elaborately-carved limestone, marble, and brick façade.

On March 3, exactly one year after he [announced the latest plans](#) during the Boston Municipal Research Bureau's annual luncheon, Mayor Thomas M. Menino will join with other city officials, community leaders and residents for a groundbreaking ceremony.

In [late November](#), the city expanded the proposal that the mayor had announced last spring. The city announced plans to take over a pair of buildings, at 2304 and 2326 Washington St., by eminent domain to provide more space for the school department relocation.

The takeover ousted businesses including a cell phone service store, clothing store, fish market and hair salon.

In addition to offices that will house an estimated 484 school department employees and another 38 staff members from the city's jobs and community services department, the 152,000-square-foot [redevelopment plan](#) also calls for new some retail space.

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(City of Boston / 2008)

At a demolition event in 2008, Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced a design contest for an \$80-million Ferdinand site redevelopment proposal, a project that ultimately faded amid economic downturn.

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