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## Blessed Sacrament church in JP will be redeveloped as 'community arts and cultural center'

Posted by Matt Rocheleau July 30, 2013 02:55 PM

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A photo of the vacant Blessed Sacrament church building along Centre Street in the Hyde Square section of JP in 2010.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The vacant Blessed Sacrament church in Jamaica Plain will be redeveloped as a "community arts and cultural center," officials said Tuesday.

In a joint statement from the three parties involved, officials formally [announced a deal](#) has been reached for the Hyde Square Task Force to buy the 96-year-old building from co-developers New Atlantic Development and the nonprofit Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation.

"We envision the church as the cultural centerpiece of our Latin Quarter," task force director Claudio Martinez said in a statement. "We want to make it a place where all residents from our neighborhood, Jamaica Plain and Boston can gather, perform, create community and celebrate individual, family and community-wide events."

Details about the plan to convert the church into an arts and cultural center are expected to be announced later.

The sale of the building to an owner who plans to use it for community space is expected to bring an end to [months of heated debate](#) in the neighborhood over what to do with the 16,800-square-foot Italian Renaissance revival-style church, which towers above Centre Street.

The co-developers had proposed housing, with most of the units selling in the moderate to high-end range. Opponents pushed back, demanding community space. At a minimum, critics wanted more affordable units be included in the housing proposals.

The controversy prompted the co-developers to try, again, to look for viable alternative uses for the church building.

The task force, which owns another building on the campus and runs youth programming there, started negotiating several months ago to buy the church and [staged a rally](#) in front of the church in May to build support for its plan to use the building for community space.

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A deal was [reached this month](#) and formally announced Tuesday.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino said in a statement that the city played a role in helping to complete the deal.

"The Blessed Sacrament campus will now serve the entire community including housing residents and youth, and enrich the neighborhood as a whole," Menino said. "We appreciate the hard work of JPNDC, New Atlantic Development, and the Hyde Square Task force, who came together with us to create a development that reflects the vibrant neighborhood of Jamaica Plain."

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston closed the church and its campus in 2004. Two years later, the city approved a master plan for New Atlantic Development and the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation to build 118 housing units, 88 of which would be designated as affordable, along with community space and parking on the 3-acre site.

So far, 81 affordable units have been built. But two historic buildings on the campus, including the church, have not been redeveloped.

A proposal to convert the other empty building, the Norbert School, into mostly market-rate apartments has drawn similar criticism as the church housing proposal had.

Earlier this month, the board of the Boston Redevelopment Authority approved the housing plan for the Norbert School, which calls for 21 apartments, two of which would be designated as affordable. The approval was granted conditionally, pending completion of the church sale to the task force.

"We're proud to have turned most of the campus into homes for 81 households who would have otherwise been priced out of Jamaica Plain," Richard Thal, director of the JPNDC, said in a statement. "The Hyde Square Task Force's work to turn the church into a cultural center will be a great culmination to the whole project."

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