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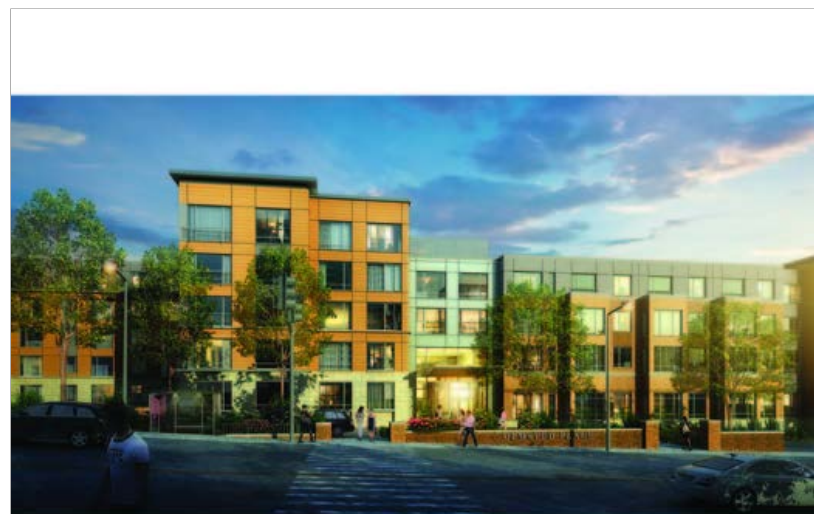
## Neighborhood group, developer settle year-old lawsuit over housing project planned for Home for Little Wanderers site in JP

Posted by Matt Rocheleau December 3, 2013 01:47 PM

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(Boston Residential Group)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A neighborhood group and developer announced Tuesday they have reached a deal to settle a year-old lawsuit that has prevented construction on a project to raze the Home for Little Wanderers complex in Jamaica Plain to build housing.

The Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council said in a statement that the agreement calls for the developer, Boston Residential Group, to increase the number of units designated as affordable housing in the project from 33 to 37 and for all four of the additional affordable units to be "family size apartments."

The deal, finalized in mid-November, also calls for the developer to "significantly lower the rent on many" of the other affordable units in the project and to, pending city approval, build a publicly-accessible footpath along part of the development site connecting South Huntington Avenue and the Jamaica way.

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"We asked BRG to make extraordinary increases in affordability for this project, and they've come through – with the changes, this development will become one of the largest affordable housing developments in JP," said a statement from JPNC chair Benjamin Day.

Curtis Kemeny, CEO of Boston Residential Group, said demolition for the project is scheduled to start in January and the project should be finished within about 18 months, or by the summer of 2015. He said he and his team are "very excited to move ahead" on the \$80-million project.

"We're ready to go and we have been ready for quite some time," Kemeny said. "It was a challenging process and this is not ideally the way we'd like the process to go but in the end all of the interests I think were balanced in a way that is allowing us to move ahead and we're just excited to do that."

Officials had said previously they planned for construction to start this past spring and hoped to open the building, to be called Olmstead Place, by this coming spring.

But, work on the project was delayed after the JPNC filed a [lawsuit](#) in Suffolk County Superior Court last December alleging that Boston Residential Group did not provide sufficient evidence to obtain zoning variances from the city for its project proposed.

The complaint also said that the city's seven-member zoning board "exceeded its authority" and "acted with gross negligence, bad faith, or malice," when it granted the four variances to the developer at a public hearing last November, the project's last permitting hurdle.

The project calls for constructing an apartment building with 196 units and around 156 parking spaces by first demolishing three buildings on the 3.5-acre site at 161 S. Huntington Ave., including the 99-year-old Knight Children's Center special education school building, a well-known facility that the nonprofit Home for Little Wanderers vacated last fall.

During the public approval process for the project, the plans were criticized by some neighbors who have said the existing buildings should be preserved and that the new development would be too large and would have too few affordably priced units.

Concerns were also aired over the project being one of a series of recent real estate- and [construction-related changes and proposals](#) for that stretch of South Huntington Avenue.

Two other key changes along S. Huntington are:

A vacant, wooded lot At 105A S. Huntington where a developer plans to build a 13-story building with 195 apartments and ground-floor retail space. [In June](#), about a month after municipal development officials finished a planning study for the area, the city approved the project. Construction is expected to start there this coming spring.

And, at 201 S. Huntington, next door to the former Little Wanderers site, sits an 85-year-old building that housed the Goddard House nursing home until Aug. 2012 when it abruptly closed. Goddard's nonprofit board put the two-acre property on the market this past spring. Some expect it will be redeveloped.

Kemeny said he hopes the project his company plans to build will "lead the way" in giving the South Huntington Avenue corridor a more residential and pedestrian-friendly feel.

"Our primary objective is to add much-needed rental housing to Boston and Jamaica Plain specifically," he said.

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(Boston Residential Group)

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