

	SECTIONS	 MY SAVED	
NEWS	▶ METRO		
ARTS	▶ BUSINESS		▶
SPORTS	▶ OPINION		▶
LIFESTYLE	▶ MAGAZINE		▶
INSIDERS	▶ TODAY'S PAPER		▶
LOTTERY	▶ OBITUARIES		▶
GLOBE NORTH	▶ GLOBE SOUTH		▶
GLOBE WEST	▶ GETTING IN		▶

Metro

Officials get donations from backers of two projects

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | OCTOBER 24, 2012

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Individuals with companies seeking permits to build two housing developments in Jamaica Plain have contributed a total of \$17,000 to the campaigns of local elected officials who represent areas around the proposed project sites.

Residents who have criticized the development plans along South Huntington Avenue raised concerns about the donations, which went to the mayor, city councilors, and a state representative. The donations are listed on a state website that tracks campaign finance records.

On Tuesday, Councilor Michael P. Ross said he plans to return \$2,000 donated to his campaign by four individuals with ties to a project under city review that would clear a wooded lot for a 12-story, 195-unit building, with a parking garage and retail at 105A South Huntington Ave. Cedar Valley Development, the project's leader, submitted a detailed proposal to the Boston Redevelopment Authority in mid-July.

Two days later, company owners Anthony M. Nader, Michael Nader, and Assad M. Nader each made \$500 donations, the maximum contribution allowed by law, to Ross's campaign, as did Helaine Nader, who lists the same address as Anthony Nader, according to campaign finance records.

"Obviously, donations do not affect my decision-making process," Ross said. "I base decisions on whether it's something I'd like to see in my district.

"No one is not following the law here," he added. "But it has been a practice of my campaign to not accept donations while developers are in the permitting process. By my own standards, I should not have accepted those."

Cedar Valley Development said in a statement: "None of it has anything to do with any project. We have long contributed" to political campaigns.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino, state Representative Jeffrey Sanchez, and city councilors Matt O'Malley and John R. Connolly also recently received donations from individuals with companies that have ties to at least one of two developments proposed for South Huntington Avenue.

Sanchez, O'Malley, and Connolly each said that the money has no influence on their work and said suggestions to the contrary are insulting and ludicrous.

Dot Joyce, a spokeswoman for Menino, said donations "have no bearing whatsoever" on the mayor.

"What matters most to him is that our neighborhoods work for all people," she said.

Several residents researched the campaign donation figures and sent their findings to news organizations Tuesday. The Globe has verified the figures.

Members of the neighborhood council and other residents have questioned the size of the projects and called for inclusion of more affordable housing units.

Altogether, 25 donations totaling \$9,200 were made to the politicians by workers at companies with ties to the development at 105A South Huntington Ave. An additional 33 donations totaling \$7,850 were made to the politicians by individuals at companies with ties to the proposal for a 196-apartment building at 161 South Huntington Ave., the site of the former Home for Little Wanderers building.

The project, which cleared a key regulatory hurdle last week and will seek final city approval next month, is

led by Boston Residential Group.

The company's president and chief executive, Curtis Kemeny, said Tuesday that he was continuing to show his longstanding support for the mayor when he made a \$500 donation to Menino on Sept. 21. That day, an official for the law firm involved with the proposed project and one for the contractor gave \$200 each to the mayor.

Three days later, Menino's campaign received another \$6,150 in donations in one day from 25 different attorneys for the developer's law firm, Nixon Peabody, which represents numerous other clients.

"We contribute the money because we believe in the candidates," said one law firm partner who donated, Lawrence S. DiCara, a former Boston City Councilor. "That's a protected right the last time I looked."

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at Mjrochele@gmail.com.

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