

BU Funding Rehab Of Caritas Housing



by Zack Huffman
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The brownstones on the edge of Bay Village that serve as a transitional shelter will soon get a \$5.7 million renovation with the help of \$1 million from Boston University.

As part of the city's approval of the development of Boston University's biolab, the school set aside funds to be used for affordable housing,

which are administered by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). Earlier this month, the BRA approved \$1 million of those funds for the renovations at 7, 11, 11A and 15 Cortes Street.

Caritas Communities, an affordable and transitional housing organization, has owned the four brownstone buildings along Cortes Street on the southern edge of Bay Village, just north

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of the Massachusetts Turnpike, since 2010.

"I think it's wonderful," said Nancy Morrisroe, president of the Bay Village Neighborhood Association. "We wholly support them being rehabbed. It's great they're getting an upgrade."

With the help of partner organization Project Place, developers at Caritas are looking to renovate the buildings, which are used to house 48 individuals who were either formerly homeless or are transitioning into the workforce.

"The housing needs a serious upgrade," said Mark Winkeller, executive director of Caritas Communities. "The housing itself has been there forever. It was last renovated 20-plus years ago."

Although the renovations will not change the number of people who stay at the homes, they will vastly improve the living conditions, which at the moment include communal bathrooms and kitchens.

"Right now, not all the residents have private bathrooms," said Winkeller. "Our goal is to give everyone a private bathroom."

The renovations are about a year away from beginning because Caritas and Project Place still

need to raise the estimated \$5.7 million for the work.

Residents will not be left homeless while the buildings are being updated, according to Winkeller, because the properties have enough vacancies that Caritas will be able to shift around most of the residents so they will not have to leave the building.

"We have the resources to move people around off site if necessary, but we prefer to not do that," said Winkeller.

When Suzanne Kenney, executive director of Project Place, learned that her organization was eligible to access linkage funds from Boston University that had been set aside for affordable housing, she knew to contact Caritas.

Project Place has become a 20 percent owner of the Cortes Street properties and will provide counseling services to the residents.

"Basically we'll help folks get back on their feet and help keep them standing," said Kenney.

The fact that Caritas Communities specializes in affordable housing while Project Place focuses on job training and counseling services allowed the two organizations to support each other and work as a team, according to Kenney.

"If this works, I'd like to see more relationships where agencies stick with what they do well and partner with agencies that complement their skill sets," said Kenney.