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BRA approves 2 South End condo conversion projects



BY BRIAN KLADKO
JOURNAL STAFF

The Boston Redevelopment Authority approved two separate condominium conversions projects in the South End this week — a 63-unit project in the building formerly owned by the American Red Cross of Massachusetts Bay, and 23 more units in a Victorian-style building that had been a blighted exception on a revitalized stretch of Washington Street.

Boston Residential Group LLC will spend \$50 million on the eight-story Red Cross building, located on Columbus Avenue next to the MBTA's Back Bay station. The one- and two-bedroom condos, which will range from 700 to 1,400 square feet, will be priced from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million, said Curtis Kemeny, Boston Residential's president.

The building also will have 10,000 square feet of retail space that would be taken up by one tenant. But the area has become primarily residential, and will become more so in coming years as the 1.3 million-square-foot Columbus Center takes shape over the Massachu-



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City officials approved condo conversions for two South End projects: the Alexandra Hotel on Washington Street, left, and the Red Cross building on Columbus Avenue.

setts Turnpike, Kemeny said.

"We've had a lot of interest from first-class restaurants, home goods and furnishings, and other users," Kemeny said.

The building has been occupied by both the Red Cross and another non-profit organization, City Year Boston. The Red Cross, which sold the building to Boston Residential in October for \$17.5 million, is moving its headquarters to Kendall Square later this year. The developer expects to begin work by the end of the year.

At the other end of the South End, the BRA approved a long-awaited, \$15 million plan to renovate the five-story Alexandra Hotel and the adjacent three-story Ivory Bean row house at the corner of Washington Street and Massachusetts Avenue.

City officials and neighborhood residents have been pushing for redevelopment of the ornate but mostly vacant buildings for two decades. Owner Peter Bakis obtained BRA approval in 2002 to renovate the 19th-century buildings into 1,100- to 1,200-square-foot apartments. When he didn't follow through, the city petitioned the Massachusetts Housing Court to appoint a receiver for the property, with the intention of redeveloping it.

The case is now on appeal, but both parties put the litigation on hold pending the BRA's approval of new plan by Gerard Kiley of Hingham and Robert Rosati of Cambridge, who agreed to buy the property for about \$3 million, city officials said.

The BRA approved Kiley and Rosati's plan to turn the building into smaller condos, ranging from 750 to 900 square feet, and to add a sixth-story glass penthouse. The building will also have 4,600 square feet of retail space, enough to accommodate two to four establishments, said architect Doug Dolezal.

BRIAN KLADKO can be reached at
bkladko@bizjournals.com.