

South End News

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American Red Cross out

Luxury condos in

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The Massachusetts Bay Chapter of the American Red Cross, headquartered at 285 Columbus Ave. for just over 10 years, will be moving out in approximately a year, said Red Cross spokesman Hugh Drummond. The Boston Residential Group LLC, a privately-held real estate development and management group, purchased the property Friday for \$17 million, and will convert the 106,000 square-foot building into about 65 luxury condominium units and a 10,000 square feet of high-end retail space.

"We're very, very excited about that location, I love the intersection of the Back Bay and the South End," said Curtis Kemeny, president and CEO of the Boston Residential Group. "I think that area is one of the most exciting areas in the city and I think with the addition of Columbus Center, it's going to become even more exciting."

Kemeny confirmed that there would be an affordable housing component to the development, which he said would be in accordance with the Mayor's Executive Order of February 2005, though he could not say in what percentages. "We want to do this project in a way that is sensitive to the needs of the local community, but at the same time, it's early," he said.

Kyle Robidoux, a longtime South Ender and an aide to At-Large Councilor Felix Arroyo, is also concerned about the new owners' engagement in the community. "I think that the Red Cross has been an anchor for the South

End community for many years," he said. "I hope that as the project moves forward there's an ability for the community to have a discussion with the new owners about community benefit, include affordable housing and space for young people."

Kemeny said that the permitting process, which will begin immediately, should take about a year, at which point development will begin. As yet, the Red Cross has not found a new home for its headquarters, but Drummond said that they are looking for a new property and have been since deciding to sell the property, valued by the city assessor at \$11,250,000, two years ago. The decision to sell was born out of the recent expansion of the chapter's services, which now includes 127 cities and town in eastern Massachusetts, up from around 75 in 2004.

"One of the things that we were addressing was that we weren't fully utilizing the space in our current location and obviously, that facility represented one of our most significant assets, and so we had to look at what special opportunities that would bring," said Drummond. "[The decision] was in the context of a number of factors and certainly financial was one of them, but this was in the context of a growing Red Cross chapter and how does it strategically want to position itself in the region going forward, still being committed to the cities and towns that it serves."

City Year is also headquartered at 285 Columbus Ave. and is currently looking for a new home. "We would very much like to stay in the South End if at all possible," said City Year spokeswoman Alison Franklin, adding that they have also been at that location for over a decade.