

South End News

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urban LIVING

New developments

Market may be slowing, but South End still a center for new construction

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Just take a stroll through the neighborhood and you'll get a sense that, despite what developers and real estate agents say, development hasn't slowed in the South End. There are at least seven major developments either under construction or in the planning process. Once constructed, they will add at least 838 housing units to the neighborhood.

The biggest of them all, of course, is the Columbus Center, a luxury residence/hotel project slated to be built in several of the air rights parcels above the Massachusetts Turnpike. Next week, the state Office of Housing and Economic Development is poised to award \$100 million in MORE (Massachusetts, Opportunity, Relocation, and Expansion) grants to cities and towns statewide. Developers of the Columbus Cen-

ter are seeking \$10 million in such grants to offset the \$125 million cost of building the deck over the Turnpike upon which much of the development will sit.

"We're hopeful that we will get it, but until we do, we're not taking anything for granted," said Alan Eisner, spokesperson for Cassin-Winn Development, which is developing the massive project.

Local politicians, including House Speaker Sal DiMasi, who represents a sliver of the South End, and state Rep. Byron Rushing of the South End, have publicly opposed the awarding of a MORE grant to Cassin-Winn.

John Keith, a South End real estate agent and creator of Bostonreb.com, a blog that monitors Boston real estate development, said he doubts the Columbus Center will ever get built, regardless of whether or not it gets a MORE grant. "I don't think it's going to happen," Keith said. "It's so expensive."

And that might be an apt metaphor for what's happening with development in the South End. Despite how things look given the continued loss of on-street parking to accommodate construction vehicles and sites, new development has slowed



The Modern, at Tremont and North Hampton Streets, is complete. Fourteen of the 25 loft apartments have been sold.

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Construction

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dramatically.

"I think it's going to stagnate for about five years," Keith said. "That's good for people who own because there won't be construction. Home prices will go up because there's as much demand [as before] but no more supply."

Meanwhile, although the South End real estate market remains strong, developers can no longer expect to sell out developments before construction is complete. The Penmark, located at West Newton and Harrison Ave, was completed nine months ago and is now 30 percent occupied, according to Robert Kenney, vice president of Kenney Development Company. The Penny Savings Bank, located at West Dedham and Washington Streets was finished this summer. Of the 23 units available, just six have been sold or are under agreement, according to Laura Connolly, spokesperson for the development.

"I think the market downturn hurt everyone," said Connolly. "I think we're a little slow but we will do fine."

"It may take another 15-18 months to sell off all the new construction, but that is to be expected," Keith said. "It isn't that common to completely sell out of a development prior to completion, people only started to expect that over the past couple of years, when the real estate market was on fire."

With few vacant parcels remaining in the South End, real estate agents have begun to speculate that the Lower Roxbury area will be targeted next. The Modern, located west of Mass Ave at Tremont and North Hampton, was completed earlier this year. Fourteen of the 25 loft apartments have been sold, according to Ricardo Rodriguez, a Coldwell Banker real estate agent who is selling The Modern.

"There's new construction on Harrison and lots of rehab on old industrial buildings that are turning residential and commercial," said Rodriguez. "After that we're looking at Mass Ave. There is no where else the South End can go. The next direction will be toward Lower Roxbury."

Developers are hoping to begin construction next door to The Modern on what's being called The Modern 2.0 later this year. They hope to have it occupied by 2008. "Lower Roxbury and the South End

historically have been very similarly culturally," Rodriguez said. "It's not surprising to me that new developments are moving in that direction."

The neighborhood's real estate market would shift dramatically if the Columbus Center emerges as a viable project. The center would create 493 residential units.

Under construction

285 Columbus

Located at the former headquarters of the American Red Cross, when it's complete 285 Columbus will have 63 loft-styled residences. Boston Residential Group will begin selling the apartments from \$500,000 to \$1.8 million later this year.

The Bryant

Located On Columbus Avenue, between Clarendon and Dartmouth Streets, the Bryant is expected to be complete in the summer of 2008. The building has 50 units. Most units are three bedrooms and all have direct elevator access. Apartments are on sale and begin at \$1.55 million.

601 Albany Street

Construction has not begun and there is no current timetable to start. The proposed development by the Hamilton Group would feature 30 apartments.

SoHa Lofts

The SoHa Lofts on Albany Street are expected to bring 59 units of housing, plus a large amount of ground-floor retail space.

700 Harrison

All one bedroom apartments have been sold out but two bedrooms priced at \$599,999 remain. The new building includes 84 apartments and is being sold through Sprogis & Neale Real Estate

Marsais

This development will see an uber-fancy renovation of the building that once served as *St. Elsewhere's* fictional St. Aegis Hospital. Once finished, it's expected to offer eight units of huge, 1868-era luxury flat-style living.



The former headquarters of the American Red Cross at 285 Columbus Ave. is being converted into 63 loft-style residences that will go for between \$500,000 and \$1.8 million.