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## More Condos Slated for Area



285 Columbus Avenue

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A cooling residential market has not stopped developers from converting two buildings in a small area of the South End into condominiums.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) is reviewing developers' plans to create condos at 79 Chandler Street and at the American Red Cross building at 285 Columbus Avenue. The two locations, which are a few blocks apart, are among a shrinking number of potential housing sites north of Tremont Street in the South End.

Russell Development and the Hamilton Company have partnered on plans to build 23 condominiums at 79 Chandler, a former halfway house that has been vacant since 2002. Architect Aaron Weinert of Hacin + Associates, which is designing the renovation, said the developers will remove balconies and fire escapes from the exterior of the late 19th century building to restore it to its original appearance. The interior will be "gutted," Weinert said, to make way for the new units.

The developers also hope to add a pent-

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## Condos

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house level to the five-story building, but that plan has drawn opposition from neighbors. At a South End Landmark District Commission (SELDC) advisory hearing last Tuesday, residents of nearby townhouses said that adding a story to 79 Chandler, which is the tallest building on the block, will obstruct their views and conflict with the area's historic character.

"Anything added to it...would be out of proportion to the rest of the buildings on the street," said Ed Johnson, one of about 15 neighbors who scrutinized the developers' plans at the hearing.

"It is going to impact the views for everyone across the street," said Anne Marie Wolfe, another neighbor.

Landmarks Commission Chair Gary Moneyhun asked the developers whether the \$9 million project could be designed with a smaller penthouse, a suggestion that Weinert said the team would consider. The commission, which must approve development in much of the South End, will hold additional hearings on the project, Moneyhun said.

The proposal also needs approval from the BRA, which will hold a public meeting on the project on Tuesday, March 14 at 6:30 pm, at 19 Chandler Street.

The BRA has also begun public review of the Boston Residential Group's (BRG) plan

to build 63 loft-style condominiums at the eight-story Red Cross building. BRG filed a project notification form with the BRA on March 3, about four months after purchasing the building for \$17.2 million.

BRG has hired architect ADD, Inc. for the project. Plans call for 14 one-bedroom and 49 two-bedroom units in the building. Eight will be affordable.

BRG President Curtis Kemeny said that construction will entail demolition of the building's interior and portions of the façade. BRG plans to add retail space along the building's ground floor. Restaurants, high end furniture stores and others have expressed interest in the building, Kemeny said.

The site lacks parking, but BRG plans to lease spots at nearby garages for tenants. The company also stresses that the project is next to the Back Bay MBTA station.

In addition to the BRA, the project needs approval from the SELDC. Construction is scheduled to take 14 to 16 months, starting next December. Kemeny said BRG hopes to open the building in early 2008.

The Red Cross of Massachusetts Bay, which has occupied the building since 1994, will relocate to 139 Main Street, in Cambridge, according to spokesman Hugh Drummond. Officials from City Year Boston, which is also housed in the building, did not respond to inquires regarding their relocation plans.