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Major projects changing neighborhood's landscape

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Before the massive \$650 million Columbus Center project, proposed for over the Massachusetts Turnpike, gets out of the gate, several other major developments are already changing the neighborhood where the South End and Back Bay meet.

Three neighboring projects will remake a block of Columbus Avenue near the Back Bay MBTA station. One mixed-use project, a nine-story, 50-unit development known as the Bryant, is under construction.

Next door at 287 Columbus Ave., City Year will transform a century-old building into its new headquarters. And the old Red Cross building at 285 Columbus (City Year's current home) will be converted into 63 condos and 10,000 square feet of retail.

Meanwhile, across the Turnpike, the largest of the projects will break ground next month where a 1928 post office on Stuart Street, and a rare surface parking lot on the corner of Clarendon Street, are now located.

The new development, called the Clarendon, will boast 285 residential units, a two-story restaurant, and a post office. The neighboring building at 131 Clarendon St., which houses the Hard Rock Café, will also be refurbished.

"Boston is becoming more and more mixed-use all the time, and this is a great location for that," said Robert Beal, the president of the Beal Cos., which is co-developing the \$200 million project with New York-based Related Cos. The building was designed by Robert

A.M. Stern Architects and Childs Bertman Tseckares.

"We wanted a traditional Back Bay building with a strong brick orientation," said Beal.

The 32-story building will house 178 apartments, 107 condos, and 393 underground parking spaces. A restaurant and market will be owned and run by Related partner Kenneth Himmel, who developed Copley Place and owns and operates Grille 23 & Bar on Berkeley Street.

Three new developments will remake a block on Columbus Avenue.

Back on Columbus Avenue, the Bryant will offer unique features — 33 of its 50 condos will have three bedrooms, and, with no hallways, three elevators will open right outside the units. David Wasserman, principal of Wasserman Real Estate Capital of Providence, said the three-bedroom condos could work for families, people who work at home, or empty-nesters used to large spaces. "This is how you take out the vagaries of market," he said. "You think

less about volume and more about what's an interesting sell, and what's not generally available."

The condos will be priced between \$1.2 million and \$2.8 million. They are being built on five sites Wasserman's firm purchased for \$18 million last year. The building, designed by Neshamkin French Architects, will have a brick façade and 83 underground parking spots, and is expected to be completed in 2008.

John A. Keith, a realtor and publisher of the Boston Real Estate Blog, said this block of Columbus Avenue is "a bit dead" and would be enlivened by more businesses and residents. But, he said, "not everybody has to live in the middle of something. That could be good for people from out of town or empty-nesters."

The Red Cross will move out of its Boston headquarters in November, and City Year will also move from the building in March. City Year's rehab of 287 Columbus Ave. will cost \$2.5 million and will include a first-floor "civic leadership" forum that can be used to host meetings of nonprofits.



PHOTOS BY PATRICIA MCDONNELL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

287 Columbus Ave. (left) will become the new headquarters of City Year while the old Red Cross building next door at 285 Columbus will be converted into 63 condos and retail space.



RENDERING/WASSERMAN REAL ESTATE CAPITAL

Units in the Bryant, being built on five sites on Columbus Avenue, will be priced between \$1.2 and \$2.8 million, and feature three-bedroom condos. It is expected to be completed in 2008.

The developers said the Red Cross building and other new developments nearby should be attractive to buyers because of their proximity to Back Bay station. The loft-style condos, which will cost

between \$500,000 and \$2.5 million, are expected to be finished by the end of next year.

"I really like how the elegance of the Back Bay meets the edginess of South End here," said Curtis Ke-

meny, the president of Boston Residential Group, which purchased the Red Cross building for \$17 million last year. Combined, he said, the projects will result in "hundreds of millions of dollars of investments that will benefit the street and make a terrific neighborhood even better."

Ground-floor retail could include a furniture or a home goods store and a high-end restaurant, he said.

Vanessa Platacis, manager of the Nashoba Brook Bakery at 288 Columbus Ave., said that while she worried about how much construction and traffic the street could handle, the end result will energize the area.

"This will be a total rejuvenation that will really fuse the South End and the Back Bay, and make these four blocks much more dynamic," she said.



Ground will be broken next month for the Clarendon on the site of a 1928 post office (left) and a parking lot. The project will boast 285 residential units and a new post office.