

At old Boston State Hospital, a community grows

The last phase of the redo of the old Mattapan mental hospital into a mixed-income neighborhood will break ground this week

By **Catherine Carlock** Globe Staff, Updated April 24, 2023, 5:32 p.m.



The former Boston State Hospital in Mattapan sat vacant for 30 years before a redevelopment effort kicked off in 2005. Olmsted Green now has 237 affordable family housing units, 60 market-rate apartments, and 59 units of low-income supportive housing for formerly homeless seniors. The final phase, an 80-unit mixed-income condominium building, is scheduled to break ground April 26. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Jerry Rappaport Jr. remembers walking the grounds of the former Boston State Hospital in Mattapan about 20 years ago, when it was nothing more than an overgrown lot with the crumbling foundation of what was once a treatment center for mentally ill people.

The state was seeking developers to revamp 38.5 acres of the property, and just two applied: a partnership between Rappaport's New Boston Fund Inc. and Lena Park Community Development Corp., and a group out of New York looking to create "manufactured housing," Rappaport recalled. The Boston group — which envisioned building a mixed-income residential community that would create opportunities for families traditionally shut out of homebuying to own their own home — won out.

Finding ways to close the racial wealth gap was important to Rappaport.



Jerry Rappaport Jr., the founder of the New Boston Fund, which developed Olmsted Green in a joint venture with the Lena Park Community Development Corp. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

“If I could work to put any dent in that very unfair, indomitable bias, it’s something I — emotionally and intellectually — wanted to do,” Rappaport said.

Today, that once-overgrown lot is Olmsted Green, a neighborhood of nearly 1,500 people in single-family homes and apartments, along with two charter schools and a new community center. Near Franklin Park and Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center, Olmsted Green feels almost suburban, with spring buds and green grass, bikes hung up in the driveway, and colorful wreaths on doors. The final phase of construction — 80 units, most of which are income-restricted for-sale homes, dubbed The Preserve at Olmsted Green — is scheduled to break ground Wednesday.

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Rappaport partnered with Boston Communities, an affordable and mixed-income housing developer, on the final stages of Olmsted Green.



F. Marie Morisset, a principal at Boston Communities, seated at Olmsted Green. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

“It’s peaceful,” said F. Marie Morisset, a principal at Boston Communities, on a recent tour of Olmsted Village and the Preserve site. “Olmsted is one of the last neighborhoods in Boston where you can get all of the amenities of a community and access to parks and transportation — everything, accessible.”

Morisset immigrated to the US from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, with her family in the 1980s, and their first home was off Cummins Highway nearby. She’s now a real estate entrepreneur who serves on the board of Boston’s Builders of Color coalition. To be a part of a project that will establish opportunities for families like hers to create generational wealth creation is “an absolute dream,” Morisset said.

“This is meaningful in so many ways,” she said.

And for residents in this ever-more-expensive city, having the chance to stay in Boston, and not have to move far afield to buy a home, is “priceless,” said Arielys Jimenez, who bought her Olmsted Green condo in 2018.

“When you’re a first-time homebuyer, and you have to go all the way out of Boston, and you’ve lived here all your life, and you work here, it’s so hard,” Jimenez said, in a video created for the groundbreaking. “My mom lives five minutes away. I work six minutes away. It’s wonderful.”



The final phase of construction for Olmsted Green — 80 units, most of which are income-restricted for-sale homes — is scheduled to break ground Wednesday. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The project is slated to cost \$41 million, including a \$21 million construction loan from Eastern Bank and Silicon Valley Bank — the paperwork was signed the day before [SVB’s surprise collapse](#), Rappaport said — and \$6 million from BlueHub Capital and The Life Initiative. Other funding comes from equity from New Boston Fund Inc. and its investors, along with city and state financing — including MassHousing’s

Commonwealth Builder program, which supports construction of affordable single-family homes and condos.

Some 63 of the 80 units will be restricted to residents making between 80 and 120 percent of the area median income — [currently](#) \$112,150 to \$168,250 for a family of four — while the remaining 17 units will be sold at market rate.

Construction is expected to be complete next year, wrapping up more than two decades' worth of work at Olmsted Green, which includes 298 affordable or mixed-income apartments, 59 units of senior housing, and another 60 homeownership units located off American Legion Highway and Morton Street. The addition of for-sale is key in a city where even middle-class families often struggle to afford a house they can own.



Olmsted Green now has 237 affordable family housing units, 60 market-rate apartments, and 59 units of low-income supportive housing for formerly homeless seniors. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

“Home ownership has provided the most powerful path to wealth creation in history and will provide a brighter future for current home-owners and future home-owners,” said State Rep. Russell Holmes in a statement. Holmes was a lead advocate for creating the Commonwealth Builder program.

More work is coming: Brighton’s 2Life Communities and an affiliate of Lena New Boston — the partnership between Rappaport’s New Boston Fund Inc. and the Lena Park CDC — plan to build more housing on an additional 10 acres of former Boston State Hospital property. The Boston Planning and Development Agency [in February approved](#) Olmsted Village, a six-building intergenerational housing project, with plans for a child care center, senior apartments, townhomes, condos, and housing for foster families and transitional-age youths.

Further down Blue Hill Avenue sits The Loop at Mattapan Station, a 135-unit income-restricted apartment building that was constructed on a former MBTA parking lot near the Mattapan Trolley and Commuter Rail station. City and state officials are scheduled to celebrate the Loop’s opening on Tuesday.

The project is a “remarkable transit-oriented development that exemplifies the City’s vision for more affordable and sustainable housing in Boston,” said Sheila Dillon, Boston’s chief of housing, in a statement. “The Loop’s housing, located next to multiple transportation options, provides a crucial link between housing, transit, and economic opportunities.”



Built on the site of an old Mattapan mental hospital, Olmsted Green is a neighborhood of nearly 1,500 people in single-family homes and apartments, along with two charter schools and a new community center. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

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I grew up one street over, when it was the fully functioning Boston State Hospital. My 1st girlfriend's house was directly across on Morton St. As a