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POSITIVE EFFECT

Jackson Square's Master Plan Comes To Life

Recent Projects Create A 'Ring Of Development,' Inspire More Community Construction

BY ROGER HERZOG AND SARA BARCAN

SPECIAL TO BANKER & TRADESMAN

Since the beginning of the new year, the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC) has invested more than \$1.1 million in efforts by the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation (JPND) to revitalize Jackson Square and the surrounding community. On



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March 2, CEDAC approved a \$400,000 loan to JPND for the development of General Heath Square Apartments, a 47-unit affordable rental property located a quarter mile from Jackson Square. A few weeks earlier, CEDAC approved \$750,000 for the non-profit's new development at 25 Amory St. The project, which shares a parcel with a proposed mixed-income building by The Community Builders



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(TCB), is the latest in a series of affordable and market-rate housing developments making up the Jackson Square Redevelopment Master Plan.

The Jackson Square Redevelopment, led by Jackson Square Partners (JSP) – a collaboration among JPND, Urban Edge, TCB and Hyde Square Task Force – is one of the largest community-driven developments in the country and will create over 300 new homes,

and community and commercial space. JSP received a \$3.4 million MassWorks grant in September, which will promote the development of infrastructure and greenspace. This current grant, along with the \$4.7 million previously committed by the commonwealth for infrastructure improvements, reinforces the strong support for such revitalization.

The Jackson Square story goes back more than five decades. When the commonwealth proposed building a commuter highway to run through the heart of Roxbury and Jamaica Plain, residents of the adjoining communities organized against it. They succeeded in halting the construction, but not before public agencies had acquired acres of land and demolished homes. In Jackson Square, 12 parcels of land comprising almost 9 acres and a total of 793,000 square feet lay empty for decades.

The then-Boston Redevelopment Authority appointed a Jackson Coordinating Group with representatives from local organizations in 1999. A comprehensive planning process over the next five years culminated in developer designation of JSP. JSP's vision to redevelop and give new life to Jackson Square has made a tremendous difference in ensuring that the revived neighborhood is meeting the needs of current residents, including improved access to the MBTA, rather than contributing to their displacement.

CEDAC joined a consortium of local lenders to provide the Jackson Square Partners a \$1.5 million predevelopment loan for master planning in 2006. Since then, the neighborhood has blossomed with new affordable housing developments focused on helping

those who would be most at risk of displacement from gentrification, and CEDAC has made additional predevelopment and permanent loans to advance these projects.

Construction's Ripples Felt Beyond JP's Borders

Jackson Square saw the first of the affordable housing sub-projects built in 2010. Although not technically part of the master plan, JPND's 270 Centre St., which provides 30 new units of affordable housing as well as street-level commercial space, now acts as a gateway for the new neighborhood. A second critical affordable housing project, Urban Edge's Jackson Commons, was completed in 2015. Located on Columbus Avenue, Jackson Commons includes 37 new units of affordable housing, with six set aside for formerly homeless families, and office space in a newly renovated century-old building. That same year, JPND broke ground at 75 Amory Ave., which will bring 39 units of affordable housing to the neighborhood.

These projects, along with The Community Builders' completed mixed-use, mixed-income 225 Centre St. project adjacent to the Jackson Square MBTA station, now form a ring of redevelopment around Jackson Square. They have spurred other community-based construction projects near Jackson Square, like the General Heath Square project and the construction of Nurture Learning Lab, a state-of-the-art non-profit child care center that opened in 2014. Urban Edge is at the beginning stages of developing a new affordable housing com-

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plex at a parcel on Columbus Avenue that is outside the master plan area, but still a part of the neighborhood, and the CDC continues to work on creating the Jackson Square Recreation Center. Most recently, the Boston Housing Authority announced that it will be soliciting proposals to rebuild a portion of the nearby Mildred C. Hailey public housing complex, formerly known as Bromley-Heath,

and has recently approved the JP/ROX rezoning plan, which will encourage mixed-income housing for the neighborhood adjacent to Jackson Square.

The success of Jackson Square in creating new homes for residents across a range of incomes not only shows that local and state governments can work with nonprofit partners to help spur neighborhood and economic devel-

opment in healthy ways, but that they can also create an ongoing and positive ripple effect beyond neighborhood borders. It's a model worth following. ■

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