

Breaking walls, opening doors for housing in Quincy



By Jessica Bartlett, Town Correspondent, November 8, 2010

The rain didn't dampen the spirits of those at the wall-breaking ceremony of the new 34-unit affordable housing complex in Quincy on Monday. If anything, it was good luck.

“Yes, it is raining today. But in Asian culture, raining on a wall-breaking day signifies good luck and good fortune – or was that weddings?” joked Michael Tow, the board president of the Asian Community Development Corp. (ACDC), the company heading up the development.

“Either way, rain or no rain, this is truly a remarkable day,” he said.

For Tow, the wall breaking was both an end and a beginning for the project -- an end for the two years of work it took to get to this point, but the beginning of construction on the development.

At this point, it's little more than a beginning; the windows are now just square holes in the side of the building, vines crawl up the exterior walls.

The plans itself are extensive. Consisting of the renovations of two existing buildings on Fort Street in Quincy, the project will combine the old St. Paul's Methodist Church, which was built in 1888 and renovated for office space in 1985, with its office building counterpart next door.

The combined property will offer 34 units of moderate- to low-income housing to a variety of people throughout Quincy, something that, according to state Representative-elect Tackey Chan, is a necessity.

“I think any time you add affordable housing, it's a good thing,” Chan said. “I do think this will create affordable housing in the vicinity of the new Quincy Center development, which is good for the overall dynamics of the city.”

Tim Doherty, a senior project manager at ACDC, agreed that although it took quite some time to reach this point, ACDC never lost their focus.

“With the economy the way it was the past couple of years, and the way affordable housing is funded now, through the private markets, it’s been a bad market as far as finding funding ... so I think, among the many hurdles in any development, that was a tough one [to face],” Doherty said.

Despite all that, Doherty was thrilled that the project was finally under way.

“We wanted to do a project in Quincy, a housing project. [Two years ago] we came out and found this building, and thought it would be a great renovation,” he said. “We loved the location and bought it two years ago, and now we’ve gotten to this point ... we’re here and we’re ready to start.”

The project marks the first in Quincy for ACDC, which usually undertakes projects in Chinatown. But ACDC isn’t just here by happenstance.

According to Janelle Chan, the acting executive director for ACDC, the Asian community has expanded far beyond its Chinatown boundaries. Quincy is one such community that has experienced that overlap.

“Right now, we’re at a very auspicious time, in our history anyway, and this is our first project in Quincy, and hopefully we’ll be able to build off that ... this project signifies our long-term commitment to this neighborhood,” Chan said.

Although ACDC is the developer of the \$11.4 million project, they are not doing it alone.

The Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation (MHIC), a private, non-for-profit lender, will provide \$5.7 million for the project. In addition, \$1.8 million will be provided by State Street Bank in state low-income housing tax credits.

In conjunction, state and federal grants and loans, as well as money from the State Department of Housing and Community Development and the City of Quincy, will help pay for the project.