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Nonprofit nearing deal for JP church

By Matt Rocheleau | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 19, 2013

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A nonprofit group is expected to complete a deal soon to buy the vacant Blessed Sacrament church in Jamaica Plain so it can use the building for community space, blocking a controversial proposal to convert the 96-year-old building into pricey condos.

The group, the Hyde Square Task Force, said it recently signed a purchase-and-sale agreement to buy the 16,800-square-foot Italian Renaissance revival-style church. Other steps are still required to seal the deal.

“For nearly a hundred years, the Blessed Sacrament church was a place where residents of all ages and all backgrounds came together for inspiration, support, and celebration,” the task force, which runs community and youth programming, said Thursday in a statement. “Going forward, we envision the church as . . . a place where all residents from our neighborhood, Jamaica Plain, and Boston can gather, perform,

create community, and celebrate individual, family, and communitywide events.”

The move could bring an end to months of heated debate in the neighborhood over what to do with the church, which towers above Centre Street. Developers have proposed housing, with most of the units selling in the moderate to high-end range. Opponents have pushed for community space.

At a minimum, critics say, more affordable units should be included in the housing proposals.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston closed the church and its campus in 2004. Two years later, the city approved a master plan for the property’s buyers, New Atlantic Development and the nonprofit Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, to build 118 housing units, 88 of which would be designated as affordable, along with community space and parking on the 3-acre site.



So far, 81 affordable units have been built. But two historic buildings on the campus, including the church, have not been redeveloped.

A proposal to convert the other empty building, the Norbert School, into mostly market-rate apartments has drawn similar criticism.

The task force, which owns another building on the campus and runs youth programming there, has been negotiating to buy the church. In the meantime, the group has continued to build support for its plan, including staging a rally in front of the church in May.

On Tuesday, the board of the Boston Redevelopment Authority approved the housing plan for the Norbert School, which calls for 21 apartments, two of which would be designated as affordable.

But Lance Campbell, a senior BRA project manager, asked top agency leaders to withhold approval documents until the church sale is complete.

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