

# After long dispute, women's home set to become affordable housing

Long-running dispute between property manager and longtime residents appears near an end



**Our Lady's Guild House has been owned since 1947 by Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception.**

**By Gal Tziperman Lotan** | GLOBE STAFF

An order of nuns that has owned a rooming house for single women near Kenmore Square for decades has agreed to sell the building after years of criticism that the owners and a property manager were trying to replace long-term residents with students who would pay higher rents.

Our Lady's Guild House, a brick building with 137 single-occupancy rooms at 20 Charlesgate West, has been owned since 1947 by Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, an order of Catholic nuns based in New Britain, Conn. As a condition of the sale, any potential buyers would have to "commit to utilizing the property in total or in significant part for the purpose of affordable housing," said Kate Norton, a spokeswoman representing Our Lady's Guild House.

The order said Monday that it has hired real estate firm Colliers to market the property. Any potential sale will likely take months to finalize and must be approved by the Massachusetts attorney general's office, since the building is operated as a public charity. Sellers are not anticipating a

closing before spring of 2022.

“Our Lady’s Guild House is committed to ensure that the vast majority of the building is affordable housing,” Norton said.

Residents of the building, who received notice of the potential sale on Monday, were relieved to hear the news, said Richard Giordano, director of policy and community planning at the Fenway Community Development Corporation, which had helped them advocate.

“The sense was kind of surprise, and happy and shock all at the same time,” said Giordano, who attended a virtual meeting with some tenants Monday. “Really happy and surprised as well, but also concerned, because there seems to be some wiggle room in the letter.”

The Fenway CDC and Planning Office of Urban Affairs — an affordable housing developer affiliated with the Archdiocese of Boston — would be interested in purchasing the building and turning it into permanent affordable housing, Giordano said.

Any potential buyers will likely finance the deal through federal low-income housing tax credits, which set rooms at rents deemed affordable to someone making 60 percent of the area’s median income, Norton said. That means qualifying tenants who earn \$50,750 a year or less would pay \$767 a month for a room, according to the Boston Planning & Development Agency’s 2021 guidelines, though median incomes are recalculated every year and may shift by the time the building sells.

Rents in the building currently range from \$810 to \$950 a month for single-occupancy rooms with shared kitchens, dining rooms, and a chapel residents can use, according to the building’s website. About 60 percent of current tenants are students, Norton said.

About a decade and a half ago, the Connecticut order’s leadership changed and the order hired Mark Roos Realty, a Kenmore Square-based real estate firm, to manage the building. In the decade that followed — from 2009 and 2019 — the number of 18- to 29-year-olds in the building increased from 16 to 85, and the number of tenants over the age of 50 declined from 46 to 8, according to a complaint tenants filed with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination.

Tenants for years have argued that the owners and management company were discriminating against older residents, trying to push them out, raise the rents, and replace them with students. Last March, as part of the investigation, the building’s owners and management agreed to halt evictions. The tenant’s complaints launched an investigation by Attorney General Maura Healey’s office in 2019, which a spokeswoman for Healey’s office said is still ongoing.

The city’s chief of housing, Sheila Dillon, said city officials are “thrilled” to hear that the building will remain in part as affordable housing.

While many details will not be worked out until a potential buyer is found — including how many units will fall under the city’s affordability guidelines and how much those units will cost — Dillon said she was optimistic about the building becoming home to permanent affordable housing.

“The city’s been working on this issue for a decade now, and we are pleased that the current owners are going to sell this really important asset to create permanent affordable housing. We certainly don’t want anyone displaced who’s living there now,” Dillon said. “We are very hopeful that 100 percent of the units at this address would be deed-restricted, long term affordable housing.”

*Gal Tziperman Lotan can be reached at [gal.lotan@globe.com](mailto:gal.lotan@globe.com) or at 617-929-2043.*