



Nearly 50 low-income senior citizen women have been pushed out of Our Lady's Guild House (OLGH) at 20 Charlesgate West over the past decade. A transfer in ownership could make space for them again.

The Fenway CDC is joining with the Planning Office of Urban Affairs (POUA), a non-profit housing developer, to try and purchase the building.

OLGH is currently owned by Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, a pontifical apostolic institute located in New Britain, Connecticut.

The House was established as a public charity in 1946. It's served as a safe and affordable home for single women, both religious and nonreligious. Changes began in 2011, when former Mother Superior Jennifer Carroll hired Marc Roos Realty to manage the property.

"It was kind of at that point that OLGH stopped running as a charity," said Cassie White, a Fenway CDC community organizer.

Roos raised rents and implemented two-year lease limits. Longtime residents were presented with eviction notices as Roos began soliciting international students and turning away women over the age of 50.

"When I first went to try to rent, they told me that because I was over 60, I could not rent a room there," said Lydia Eccles. Eccles applied for an exception in 2016 and was allowed to rent a room. But two years later, she was told to leave.

"I can't afford a one-bedroom apartment in Boston, so for me it's a huge security to have a room there if I can manage to stay," said Eccles, who has been fighting her eviction.

Judy Burnett, a retired school aide and postal worker who came to OLGH in 2008, has been fighting to keep her housing since 2014. "When I moved here, there were ladies who had been here 25 or 30 years. It was a home to single women of all colors and faith. It was a very congenial place, very present, very social," Burnett said.

Today, there are only 7 original residents left. "Those of us who have been fighting it in one way or another, we're still here," Burnett said.

Roos Realty is currently undergoing two investigations by the Attorney General's office, in both the public charities and civil rights divisions. In three individual women's cases, government agencies have found probable cause for discrimination by Roos Realty.

While the investigations are open, Roos has agreed to pause evictions.

"At this moment we're really hoping that Attorney General Maura Healy will do the right thing and require a transfer of ownership," White said, a move that would allow Fenway CDC and POAU to purchase the property.

"We have initiated some contact with the Daughters to express interest in purchasing but that has not been fruitful."

William Grogan, President of POUA, sees preserving OLGH as a key piece in addressing Boston's affordable housing crisis.

"It's critical to make strong efforts to preserve housing like Our Lady's Guild House with restrictions in place that will ensure it can remain affordable for the next generation," Grogan said.

In addition to being affordable, OLGH has been a place where women, "had a community and they had the bonds of growing old together," Lynne Dewhurst-McBurney explained.

Her mother, Adele Blank, lived at OLGH for 17 years and received an eviction notice in 2014 at 72 years old. Dewhurst-McBurney, helped her find housing in New Jersey, where she lived until she passed away in July.

"She was really traumatized by having to leave," Dewhurst-McBurney said.

"My mother didn't die of Covid, she didn't die of cancer. If you want to be dramatic and poetic, you say it broke her heart to have to leave the place she lived for 17 years."

In February, Mother Janice Duncheck took over as Mother Superior after Mother Carroll passed away. Residents facing eviction, Fenway CDC, and POUA are hopeful that she'll be open to selling the property.

"We're putting our faith in her," said Eccles said. "We're hoping for a change once she understands what's happening and what Roos has done. Why wouldn't she want to return Our Lady's Guild House to its mission?"

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