



THE BAY STATE
Banner

We cultivate talent and
GROW SATISFYING CAREERS.



APRIL 15, 2010 — VOL. 45, NO 36

HOME

BLOGS

BE HEALTHY

STEP UP

CAREER EVENTS

JOBS

Major projects coming to Jamaica Plain

[[EMAIL](#) | [PRINT](#) | [SHARE](#)]



An architect's rendering of the planned Arboretum Place development, to be built south of Forest Hills station (Image courtesy of WCI Corporation)

Jeremy C. Fox

Jamaica Plain's main thoroughfare, the Centre Street/South Street corridor, has undergone profound changes as the neighborhood has developed from a Victorian streetcar suburb to the culturally and economically diverse community it is today.

But recently city agencies and local developers have begun planning and construction on a variety of development projects and infrastructure improvements along that corridor that, if they all come to pass, will change the appearance, demographics and flow of life in the community in dramatic new ways.

As reported in the Banner earlier this month, some of the biggest changes are coming to Jackson Square. A local consortium of for-profit and nonprofit developers are launching a series of construction projects there that are planned to add more than 400 units of mixed-income housing, along with ample retail, recreation



Plans for Monument Square are on hold awaiting further input from neighbors and business owners. (Jeremy C. Fox photo)

and community spaces.

But follow Centre and South Streets as they curve southwest through the neighborhood, and several other projects promise their own significant changes.

Just a few blocks down Centre Street, between Jackson and Hyde Squares, the campus of the former Blessed Sacrament Church is in the midst of a remarkable reconfiguration.

Sold in 2005 by the Catholic Church to the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation (JPNDC) and New Atlantic Development for \$6 million, the seven-building campus has been under construction for well over a year and already boasts one project that's completed and inhabited.



An architect's rendering of the planned Arboretum Place development. (Image courtesy of WCI Corporation).

Creighton Commons, a complex made up of the former rectory and a new building that together include 16 below-market-rate condominium units, opened late last year.

Right next door, at the intersection of Centre and Creighton Streets, another new building is steadily taking shape, one that will include 36 units of cooperative housing above ground-floor retail spaces, and is planned to be finished by October of this year.

On the other side of Creighton Commons, at the corner of Creighton and Sunnyside Streets, the developers plan to convert a former convent to 28 single-room occupancy units to be made available to the formerly homeless and operated by the Pine Street Inn. That project is intended to be completed by March of next year.

The former church building may soon become a quasi-communal "cohousing" development of 37 condos (four would be "affordable" and the rest sold at market rate) and shared community spaces.

Late last year, Stony Brook Cohousing and Rees-Larkin Development signed a purchase and sale agreement for the church, and in January they selected Mostue & Associates as architects for the project, which is scheduled to begin construction in December.

Just a block from the Blessed Sacrament campus, Hyde Square may soon see a variety of changes under the Centre/South Streetscape and Transportation Action Plan, a project funded through the city's capital plan that will bring improved sidewalks and plantings, new benches and a variety of other changes to the corridor.

The plan is a collaboration between the Boston Transportation Department, the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services. They are now largely focused on making changes to the Hyde Square rotary and the Monument Square intersection at the far end of Centre Street's commercial strip, two places where planners say streets are wider than necessary and some of the area could be used to increase pedestrian safety and add more green space.

At a meeting of the project's community advisory committee on March 23, community members reviewed design options and generally expressed a preference for preserving the basic configuration of Hyde Square and only reclaiming part of the roadway to become an enlarged sidewalk with added green space. They appeared to reject the more dramatic plans that would reroute traffic in the area.

There was less consensus about Monument Square, and people thought that more area residents and business owners should weigh in before the project moves forward.

Vineet Gupta, director of policy and planning at the Boston Transportation Department, told the Banner in a phone interview that the conceptual designs for both squares should be ready by this fall, with final

design work taking about another eight months. Construction would begin in spring 2012 at the earliest.

"We don't like to proceed with a particular concept and design until we are sure that the abutters feel that they're getting benefits rather than impacts," Gupta said.

The action plan may also include a set of changes to Centre Street between Jackson Square and Monument Square that would include eliminating some street parking to widen sidewalks and add bicycle lanes. That work, consisting largely of repainting lane markers, could begin this fall or early next spring, according to Gupta.

Perhaps the most controversial change planned for Jamaica Plain is the update to the MBTA's 39 bus route, which traverses Centre Street, South Huntington Avenue and Huntington Avenue into the Back Bay, conveying thousands of people between Jamaica Plain and the city center each day.

The bus route, the MBTA's second-busiest, would lose a handful of stops and see others relocated, with the intended benefit of speeding up service that many say is too slow or erratic.

Jeffrey Ferris, owner of Ferris Wheels Bike Shop on South Street, is in the Route 39 Citizens' Working Group.

In a phone interview, Ferris said he was disappointed that the MBTA appeared to focus on specific changes it planned rather than remain open to a wide-ranging discussion of issues, but he was hopeful that the changes would have a positive impact, even though one of the stops being moved was at the intersection next to his shop.

"Not everybody gets a bus stop in front of your door," Ferris said. "When you move one around, somebody gets to walk a little further and somebody gets to walk a little bit less; but, either way, there's some walking involved. Walking an extra block isn't necessarily a horrible thing."

The stop Ferris and his customers lost was to be at the edge of the South Street Mall and Courts at the corner of South Street and Carolina Avenue. The basketball and tennis courts there were ripped up, and the existing trees were uprooted to make way for a redesigned park. The park will include upgraded athletic courts and green space with park benches, tables and a new decorative fence designed by local artist Beth Galston.

Less than a mile south of Carolina Avenue, efforts are underway to develop the first two of four MBTA-owned lots adjoining the Forest Hills terminus of the Orange Line. The plans are the first stage of a long-gestating project, the Forest Hills Improvement Initiative.

The Arboretum Place development proposed by Jamaica Plain-based WCI Realty would include a set of new developments on Washington Street southwest of the Forest Hills MBTA station. In a phone interview, WCI President Kevin Walker explained that the development is now awaiting approval of a zoning change to permit retail and commercial use on land currently zoned as open space. The board of the Boston Redevelopment Authority planned to review the proposed change this week.

Walker said that the city had so far been very cooperative and supportive of the plans and that neighborhood residents largely welcomed the development, which could include a neighborhood grocer.

"The majority of people are excited about adding retail to the Forest Hills area, and commercial space," Walker said.

If WCI receives all the necessary approvals, construction on Arboretum Place could begin by early fall.