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## BEST USE IN BRIGHTON

**T**HE CONTROVERSY in Brighton over the reuse of Our Lady of the Presentation School points to the potential for painful days ahead in communities where dozens of church properties will soon be offered for sale. Time is running out to design a reliable planning process that respects both the financial needs of the Archdiocese of Boston and the aspirations of the communities about to be affected.

Oak Square activists saw an opportunity to counter escalating poverty rates, institutional expansion, and declining home ownership in Allston-Brighton through the creation of a "youth and families campus" at the Presentation School, which is slated to close in June. The in-depth proposal — months in the making — calls for the creation of full-time preschool, independent elementary school, YMCA after-school, and adult education classes at the site. Support is strong in the neighborhood and among human service workers. And organizers stress that they are prepared to pay the market price for the property.

Such a use would seem to fit well with the needs of the cash-strapped archdiocese, which is coping with the cost of a massive clergy sexual abuse settlement and an unfunded pension liability. The proposal also matches the overall social mission of the church. But the archdiocese revealed this week that it will retain the building for future use as a tribunal (dealing primarily with peti-

tions to nullify marriages) and for administrative offices for pastoral ministries, religious education, and adult education.

Last March archdiocese officials spurned efforts by Boston city planners to engage in a master planning process on the future of church buildings in the city. The impact of that decision is now being felt. A carefully coordinated approach might have recognized the value of the community campus or revealed an alternate site for the archdiocese offices, which now sit on church property slated to be sold to Boston College. Minimally, the Oak Square neighbors might have been spared much labor — and their current despair — had they known that the building was spoken for.

Bishop Richard Lennon said in an interview yesterday that the archdiocese intends to create a strategic planning committee within its finance council to weigh property disposition issues, including the need to balance the financial needs of the church and its social mission. The committee is expected to be formed in four to six weeks — about the same time that archdiocese officials are scheduled to review the bids on the first group of church properties that went to market.

The new committee will have its hands full. But it could set the right tone by revisiting plans for the Presentation School site to see whether there might still be room for a use as beneficial for the public — and consistent with the values of the church — as the proposed family campus.