

Editorial: OLP community shortchanged by archdiocese

Friday, January 21, 2005

The Archdiocese of Boston's decision to reject the community's bid to buy and save the Our Lady of the Presentation School is a tragic moment for Allston and Brighton.

In a story that broke in the Allston-Brighton TAB's online edition last Friday, the archdiocese has told the group of parents and community leaders through a letter that its plan to buy the school for \$3 million was not good enough and that it wished to keep the property for itself.

The plan, developed by OLP parents over a six-month period, called for the archdiocese to sell the school to community members at market value and turn the Oak Square building into a nonprofit school, a preschool and community center. It was a tremendously ambitious plan that was solid in its fiscal reality and rich with benefits for the entire Allston-Brighton community.

Not only did the 150-page proposal outline a way for the school to be saved, it also provided some welcome space for the community. Two classrooms were to be leased by the YMCA for after-school, summer programs and classes. Each floor of the building, including the basement, was designed to accommodate two multi-use classrooms. The multi-use classrooms could be used by community groups, including adult education.

And not to be overlooked were provisions for a year-round day-care center.


The plan by the OLP parents was met with wide support by the community. As reported, at least 25 community associations sent letters in support of proposal to the archdiocese last month, including Mayor Thomas Menino, Boston City Council, the Brazilian Immigration Center, the Brighton-Allston Improvement Association and Boston University.


Curiously, the only entity the OLP parents approached that did not offer support for the plan was Boston College, which last year reached an agreement to buy up a large portion of the archdiocese's property on Lake Street. Many are angry at BC's lack of support, which appears to be rooted more in its own self-interest than in those of the community.


Bishop Richard Lennon wrote to the parents in a short five-sentence letter that the archdiocese plans to "retain Our Lady of the Presentation School building for archdiocesan needs, rather than dispose of it." The archdiocese earlier this week made it clearer what those needs are, namely to turn the school into the Metropolitan Tribunal, currently located at 1 Lake St. - a building Boston College is buying. That sale was planned as far back as last April.


This is just one more in a long line of public relations calamities that the archdiocese has brought upon itself. It has done very little in A-B to dispel feelings that many of its actions are done through an atmosphere of secrecy and arrogance. Archbishop Sean O'Malley is a big improvement over Cardinal Bernard Law, but the Catholic Church has a long ways to go in winning back the confidence and trust of the community. The archdiocese will find very few people who will be convinced that its plan for the OLP serves the people of A-B better than what the OLP parents saw in its vision for the property.

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
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