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Presentation School building sold

Richard Cherecwich/Staff writer

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BRIGHTON, MASS. - After nearly three years of challenges and countless hours of commitment and work, the Presentation School Foundation has a monumental victory to celebrate; it will acquire the former Our Lady of the Presentation School building from the Archdiocese of Boston on Thursday or Friday, sources close to the sale say.

“Its overwhelming. Just wonderful,” PSF president Jennifer Doyle said. “Our goal was to put something that was a community anchor back into the hands of the community. PSF has always represented the community voice and this will help us make sure our vision becomes a reality.”

The archdiocese closed the school and parish in 2004, even locking the doors two days before school was scheduled to end. Since then, the community has worked tirelessly to purchase the property and create a community center offering pre-school, summer school, student enrichment, adult education classes and immigrant outreach programs.

Negotiations stalled many times before the group entered into a purchase and sale agreement with the archdiocese last year that gave them one year to raise \$1 million to buy the building. That agreement was set to expire on Oct. 16.

“The agreement created an opportunity, and we needed to seize that opportunity,” PSF chairman Kevin Carragee said. “It could only be seized through a great deal of work from a great group of people.”

On Wednesday, PSF leaders expressed joy with the sale and stressed it was a community effort.

“It’s the culmination of several years of sustained civic engagements, shared self sacrifice and perseverance,” executive director Steven Krueger said. “It’s also a story of hope, because of what this means to the community and what the community will represent.”

In a part of Boston plagued with the closings of several Catholic parishes and parochial schools, low owner-occupancy, a transient community and the increasing encroachment of local universities, the reacquisition of the Oak Square institution was seen as a major triumph for Allston-Brighton.

“This is really a demonstration of civic engagement in a dramatic way, and groups of dedicated people can make their own history and shape their communities in the way they desire,” Carragee said. “This was a victory that the neighborhood needed, and people were happy to sacrifice a great deal of their time and their energies, because they realized how significant this was for the community’s future.”

On Wednesday, officials were still “feverishly” working on closing the deal, Krueger said. A formal announcement will be made during a celebration on Friday, Oct. 12, in Oak Square with Mayor Thomas Menino and Cardinal Sean O’Malley in attendance.

“We’re in the debt of a lot of people, and they’re the ones that need to be celebrated; from the mayor, to 80-year-old senior citizens who made donations, to children who made signs, to local businesses, to long-term residents, to new residents,” Carragee said.

In reaching the \$1 million purchase price, the foundation raised more than \$500,000 in donations. An agreement with Boston Community Capital allows the foundation to draw on \$1.26 million as well. In July, PSF had only raised \$200,000 in donations, and officials will reveal on Friday how they acquired the additional money.

“We are going to announce the support we received that put us in a position to make this transaction possible and, ultimately, put us in a position to make the vision of the community a reality,” Krueger said.

With the purchase of the property out of the way, the organization will now focus on its goal of raising \$3 million to complete renovations on the building, which needs new heating and electrical systems. Renovations will begin in the spring. PSF will continue

its fundraising efforts and also seek grants and donations from major donors to reach its goal.

“There’s an old expression, ‘nothing succeeds like success,’” Krueger said. “We haven’t won the World Series yet, but we’re in the playoffs.”

Archdiocese representatives declined to comment for this story.

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