

## ***Life slowly returns to Cambridge's 'nonprofit row'***

*Redevelopment authority seeks tenant for remaining space in Bishop Allen Drive building*

*William J. Dowd, Wicked Local 1/28/22*

Cambridge Redevelopment Authority is wrapping up a multi-million dollar, comprehensive renovation of 93-99 Bishop Allen Drive, the longtime home to an eclectic group of social-service and community-based organizations known as "nonprofit row" in Central Square.

Erica Schwarz, the CRA project manager, reports life is slowly returning to the historic building after the city handed over a certificate of occupancy.

"This is a real win for this neighborhood and our nonprofit tenants who are returning," said Schwarz. "The building is so beautiful, and it's just a very good moment for this project."



At the bequest of the building's nonprofit tenants, the CRA acquired the Central Square property for \$8.8 million in the fall of 2019 and subsequent

renovation. It has pledged to preserve 93-99 Bishop Allen Drive as affordable office space exclusively for nonprofits in perpetuity.

"The building is fully occupied by nonprofit organizations, including Enroot, who has transitioned from owner to tenant. Those organizations provide a range of essential community programs," the CRA's webpage on the project reads. "The building's location in Central Square, very close to public transportation, as well as other characteristics of the site, make it uniquely important as a site for social services."

## **The scope of work**

Schwarz said the exterior and interior renovation work sought, in part, to modernize the property and address standing issues.

"We wanted it to be a place where the nonprofits can work and be supported in their work," she said, adding this building has always been beloved.

"Before renovations, it just had a lot of issues that undermined people's comfort."

The renovations kicked off last spring and came in on time and under budget - with some \$100,000 in contingency funds remaining. The scope of work included but was not limited to:

- Electrical, fire safety and HVAC upgrades
- A new bike park
- Upgrading the fire system
- Restoring the building's front facade
- Making the building fully accessible, including installing an elevator
- Masonry repairs, repointing and washing
- The installation of a new roof



"There are two renovation items that will be completed in the spring once the weather warms: new sidewalks and protective finishes on the main entry canopy," the CRA's webpage reads. " Also in the first half of 2022, the building will see an installation of solar panels on its roof."

## **Saving nonprofit row**

In 93-99 Bishop Allen Drive reside community-based organizations providing what the CRA and others consider vital services from the Greater Boston Area Rape Crisis Center to Cambridge Community Foundation to the Young People's Project and the Brattle Film Foundation.

Schwarz said the \$11.3 million investment will extend "nonprofit row" legacy, one that stretches to the 1960s, at a time when organizations fear displacement due to astronomically high rents in Cambridge. Rising rents and real estate costs have spawned ongoing conversations about how to attract and retain nonprofits in the city.



Meanwhile, Tom Evans, the CRA's executive director, has been given a green light to execute a lease with The Loop Lab - which plans to install a recording studio in their rental space. The Cambridge-based nonprofit empowers people of color between 18 to 26 through training programs that develop audio and video skills.

The Loop Lab responded to the CRA's request for proposals advertised for nonprofits that may be interested in the-then three available spaces ranging in sizes between 393 to 1,230 square feet. The RFP process has lacked luster, Schwarz said.

"We did have an RFQ out there for many months," she said. "It's just the uncertainty [around COVID] has resulted in so much less interest from this population that otherwise needs affordable space."





She said the CRA does have one more space to rent out.

"So the RFQ actually had a deadline and then we kind of made it rolling," she said. "So it's still out there for organizations to respond to."

The CRA will host a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the major renovation - which the nonprofit said it will publicize widely for once a date is settled on - in the late winter or early spring. To learn more, visit: [cambridgeredevelopment.org/99bishopallen](http://cambridgeredevelopment.org/99bishopallen)