

United Front Homes

285 Ash Street
New Bedford, MA 02740

Project Partners

- City of New Bedford
- Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
- Mass Housing (MHFA)
- United Front Development Corporation (UFDC)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD)

Preservation Challenge

United Front Homes is a 200-unit family housing development located five blocks west of City Hall in downtown New Bedford. The property encompasses an eleven acre parcel bordered by Kempton Street, Chancery Street, Court Street, and the city-owned Magnet Park. United Front Homes currently features 20 three-story apartment buildings, a community center and a daycare facility.

The property was originally developed as an “Urban Renewal” project in the 1970s through a partnership between United Front Development Corporation (UFDC), a local non-profit social justice organization, and National Housing Partnership (NHP), a congressionally chartered corporation, to serve low income residents of New Bedford. It has a proud history but has struggled since its inception due to an inadequate capital structure and flaws in the project’s initial design. The 200 units of low-income housing are concentrated on a “super-block” site in buildings which are out of context with the surrounding architecture, preclude emergency access, and often have no street presence. By 2007, United Front Homes was at risk of failure due to over-burdening debt, insufficient operating subsidy, extremely high utility costs, and poor property management. United Front also suffered from a mounting ledger of deferred capital needs, while nearly a quarter of its units were vacant.

POAH’s Role

In 2007, UFDC approached POAH about partnering to save United Front Homes. POAH determined that only a major infusion of capital and a new approach to operating the property would avert the loss of this critical affordable housing asset that is walking distance from downtown. POAH brokered an arrangement with the City, Mass Housing, and the owners – UFDC and Apartment Investment and Management Company (AIMCO), who acquired their interest when they bought NHP – to allow POAH and UFDC sufficient time and resources to stabilize operations and assemble the financial resources required to reposition the property.

POAH took over responsibility for property operations in mid-November, 2007, and hired MB Management to run day-to-day property management and maintenance. MB worked diligently to stabilize the property for the interim period while POAH, in collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders, developed a revitalization plan for the long term stabilization and preservation of United Front Homes. POAH acquired the property in December, 2008.

The revitalization will transform the site's image, as well as the amenities, functionality and safety of the community. New streets will reconnect the site to the surrounding neighborhood and allow families to benefit from a proper street orientation with a front door and a back door. POAH and UFDC will demolish pieces of some buildings, will renovate the remaining homes and, in strategic locations, build new residences to create a new United Front Homes neighborhood. The result will be a visually appealing, energy efficient community designed to meet the needs of today's residents, with the amenities, such as community space, playgrounds and the day care facility, that the community relies on.