

South End *News*

40 Berkeley in new hands, on same path

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Owners still deciding what changes will be made

A South End team recently purchased 40 Berkeley Street from the YWCA. Project Place, which currently runs a program within the buildings walls, Maloney Properties, which has long been the management firm for the property, and South End residents Georgia Murray and Mark Maloney came together to finally take charge of the building, which has seen several failed deals over the last few years.

"40 Berkeley has a long and storied history," Murray said in a recent phone interview. Murray explained the building, originally a place for young women looking for jobs and opportunities, changed its purpose during the 1950s, when it split into three components. Currently, a dorm for Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology students, a youth hostel, and 55 affordable housing units through Project Place's Betty's Place program reside in the building. Betty's Place provides stable housing and case management services to women who have been homeless and need an affordable and safe place to live.

"We're going to keep those three legs of the stool in place," said Murray of the services the building currently offers.

Project Place's executive director Suzanne Kenney said the new group of owners is still meeting and getting to know each other while they decide which way to move forward in terms of capital and program improvements.

"We have diverse interests, and yet at the same time we, both parties, want to see this property as a great resource to the city," Kenney said.

Murray said they plan to renovate the building's lobby and are toying with the idea of adding some studio apartments to the affordable housing section that won't have to depend on common bathroom and kitchen areas. They also plan to renovate other areas of the building that need updating.

Over the next several months, the owners plan to meet with each other and the Ellis South End Neighborhood Association (ESENA) while they determine what their final plans are. Murray said tours for ESENA members, as well as surrounding neighbors will be available to interested parties at some time in the future.

In a press release about the acquisition, Mayor Tom Menino said the new ownership of the property "represents the best opportunity to stabilize" the property while upgrading it at the same time.