

Preserving nonprofit space

Facing the potential loss of our affordable offices at 93-99 Bishop Allen Drive, we found a solution and community support to address a mounting regional problem.

Here's what it took:

1. ASSESSING — FALL 2018

September 25, 2018
Enroot notifies CCF the building will be sold

October 4, 2018
CCF forms the CCF Real Estate Committee, including board members and experts in development and real estate, to conduct research and explore solutions. Regular meetings are held through July 2019; conversations/meetings among building tenants begin

October 18, 2018
Enroot publicly announces the building sale

October 25, 2018
Enroot and tenants meet to discuss the building sale, concerns, options for transition period

Ongoing
Conversations among building tenants continue

November 20, 2018
CCF begins discussions with CRA; Enroot announces it will extend all leases to July 31, 2021

December 21, 2018
CCF and CRA enter into a memorandum of understanding to explore the viability of retaining 93-99 Bishop Allen Drive for nonprofit use

3. ADVOCATING — SPRING 2019

March to April 2019
Seven city councilors and tenants of the building write letters of support for CRA purchase; petition on change.org gains more than 500 supporters

Purchase milestones:

April 11, 2019
CRA submits formal bid to Enroot

June 25, 2019
CRA/Enroot announce that a purchase and sale agreement has been signed

October 2, 2019
CRA/Enroot close on building sale

4. CELEBRATING — SUMMER/FALL 2019

October 10, 2019
CRA, CCF, and the other nonprofits at 93-99 Bishop Allen Drive celebrate with a party

November 15, 2019
CRA, CCF, and the Central Square Business Improvement District host a public celebration

This year, Cambridge came very close to losing an important site for nonprofit services. The sale of the rowhouses at 93-99 Bishop Allen Drive would have displaced CCF and 10 other social-service and arts nonprofits that educate, lead, heal, and inspire. Last fall, the buildings' owner, Enroot, announced it was selling the nearly 18,000-square-foot space so it could expand its mission of promoting educational equity for immigrant students. Tenants feared a bidding war among commercial developers.

Sounding the alarm

For nonprofits working on shoe-string budgets, the potential loss could have had devastating consequences. "We have deep roots in this location and being near the T is crucial for us," said Gina Scaramella, executive director of the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center. Maisha Moses of the Young People's Project added that "if anything was going to happen, we knew we had to talk to CCF."

Finding a solution

Within a week after learning about the sale, the Foundation formed a project team and started looking for solutions by talking to the community and researching what other cities have done. "That led us to connect with the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority," said CCF board member Andus Baker, who led the project team.

"We had heard rumors about the sale but didn't consider it something we'd get involved with until the Foundation reached out as a potential partner," said Tom Evans, executive director of the CRA, which usually takes on new construction and repurposing projects. As part of the grass-roots outreach, City Council candidate Nicola Williams started an online petition and several sitting councilors wrote letters urging Enroot to accept the CRA's bid. In early October of this year, when CRA's purchase of the building was announced, the tenants celebrated. "By working together," said Ben Moynihan of the Algebra Project, "we created a space for dialogue and found a way to collectively make it happen."

Joining forces to protect nonprofits

"It wouldn't have worked without the Cambridge Community Foundation's involvement," said Evans. "The Foundation is a key, trusted partner to all of the buildings' tenants, and it became the thought leader on this, making the connections that needed to be made."

Evans said that other nonprofits in the city may be at risk going forward. "The success of CRA's economic development work in Kendall Square has created new challenges in that it's helping to spur displacement of some of the institutions that are a key component of what makes Cambridge unique," he said. "We need to make sure we continue to value innovations not only in business and technology, but in the social sector as well. CCF helped to start that conversation."