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Opening of Dorchester’s Treadmark Represents Reborn Neighborhood

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The recent opening of the Treadmark development represents a major milestone in the continued transformation of Boston’s Ashmont/Peabody Square, an effort that has been in the works since the late 1990s. This newly constructed 83-unit mixed-income, mixed-use, transit-oriented development is only the latest example of the renaissance of one of Dorchester’s most storied neighborhoods – a neighborhood where some of us here at Trinity have called home for many years.

When passing through Ashmont/Peabody Square today, it’s hard to imagine the major challenges this community faced in the not-so-distant past. For too long, Ashmont/Peabody Square was largely viewed as an uninviting pass-through, a place through which people often drove to get somewhere else. While heavily used by neighborhood residents, the train station was dirty, dilapidated and dysfunctional. The pedestrian-unfriendly intersection served more as a barrier than a connector to the many neighborhoods around it.

How Parcel Came to Be

The Rev. Daniel J. Finn of St. Mark’s Church led the effort to create a Mainstreet program for the area beginning in 1999, and the St. Mark’s/Greater Ashmont Mainstreet has since been a catalyst in the revitalization of the square. With the help from then state Reps. Marty Walsh and Tom Finneran and City Councilor Maureen Feeney, Mainstreet was able to persuade the MBTA to allocate $35 million in 2005 to completely reconstruct the 75-year-old station. Along with that reconstruction, the group urged the MBTA to reconfigure the station to better connect to Peabody Square, and free up a sizeable chunk of the station’s footprint for private development. The MBTA was ultimately very responsive.

With regards to the private parcel, Trinity was the only respondent to the MBTA’s request for proposals, and we envisioned an 116-unit, mixed-income, mixed-use project called Ashmont TOD, which was among the earliest projects promoting developing housing next to mass transit.

But it was more than that. Part of it was much-needed affordable rental housing, part of it was market-rate homeownership and part of it was retail space for a stretch of Dorchester Avenue that had been previously vacant and lifeless.

St. Mark’s/Greater Ashmont Mainstreet organized the public review process, and later facilitated discussions with the MBTA to enable the construction of the new station and new building at the same time, now known as The Carruth building. The station reconstruction, reconnecting the station to Peabody Square, and the development of the Carruth were game changers for the neighborhood.

A True Neighborhood

The area has continued to thrive in the decade since.

Because of the success of The Carruth, we were encouraged by many neighbors to undertake another project at Ashmont Station, initially named Ashmont TOD 2, but now named Treadmark in homage to the long-standing tire shop that operated at the site. We replicated The Carruth model, with 51 affordable rental units, 32 homeownership units and ground floor retail. Anchoring our retail is American Provisions, offering specialty foods, wines and craft beers.

Today, Ashmont/Peabody Square is a true neighborhood with thriving local businesses and amenities, including two excellent restaurants, one of which was recently named one of the top Italian restaurants in the city. Residents can enjoy activities like the Ashmont Hill Chamber Music concerts, the Dot Jazz Series, the Dorchester Bike & Brew street festival and the Ashmont Farmers Market. Ashmont/Peabody Square has come a long way, and the journey has been as diverse and inclusive as the neighborhoods around it.

The heart of any neighborhood, as anyone who has lived in such a community knows, is the people in it. This is especially true in Dorchester, where generations of Boston families have lived, creating a rich social and cultural tapestry, enjoyed by both “OFD’ers,” as people originally from Dorchester are called, and newcomers alike. Thus, the real story of this transformation is the dedicated Dorchester neighborhood leaders, elected officials and residents who have given so much time and effort to improve this community. For so many of these individuals, the revitalization of Ashmont/Peabody Square has been their life’s work. They saw when maybe others didn’t the potential of this neighborhood, and while there is still much to be done, they have every right to celebrate its success.

James Keefe is the principal of Trinity Financial Inc.

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