

City Grants the Archdiocese Permission to Demolish Rochambeau Apartments

The Archdiocese of Baltimore today welcomed the decision by Baltimore Housing Commissioner Paul T. Graziano to approve the Archdiocese's application to raze the Rochambeau Apartments, a vacant seven-story building located on the southwest corner of Franklin and Charles Streets.

"We are grateful to Mayor O'Malley and are pleased with the City's decision. We look forward to working with our neighbors along Charles Street as we move ahead with our plans for the John Paul II Memorial Prayer Garden and the rededication of the Basilica," Cardinal William H. Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, said.

The new prayer garden will be adjacent to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, America's first Catholic cathedral, which has undergone a two-year, \$32 million restoration and is due to reopen on November 4, 2006.

The Basilica restoration project is one of the many preservation efforts undertaken by the Catholic Church in Baltimore in recent years, including, St. Alphonsus at Park and Saratoga Streets (\$780,000 in 2004); St. Vincent de Paul on Front Street (\$1.2 million in 2005); and Corpus Christi in Bolton Hill (\$460,000 in 2005).

"The Catholic Church's commitment to historic preservation can be seen in nearly every neighborhood in Baltimore and most especially in the Basilica—the most historic house of worship in the United States," Cardinal Keeler said. The plans for demolition and creation of the prayer garden have received broad support from groups such as the Charles Street Development Corporation, Downtown Partnership, and the Mount Vernon Cultural District, and the Archdiocese has hired a respected urban architect to insure a high quality design that will conform to the aesthetics of the Charles Street corridor. "We greatly appreciate the overwhelming support we have received from those in the community who recognize that the

building has been the source of problems for decades and that now the corner will contribute in a positive way,” Cardinal Keeler said.

In accordance with the Central Business District Urban Renewal Plan, an economic feasibility study was conducted by Lipman Frizzell & Mitchell LLC, which concluded that no economically feasible scenario existed for the Archdiocese to rehabilitate the structure. The City conducted its own independent analysis and the resulting report also found that rehabilitation was not economically feasible for the Church.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore, which owns the other buildings on the block bounded by Franklin, Cathedral, Mulberry, and Charles Streets, acquired the building in 2001 to control the fate of the block and with plans to convert the space to further its religious mission. The Archdiocese plans to move quickly toward construction of a very attractive prayer garden with plans for flowering trees, perennial flowers, shrubs, and beautiful statuary and interpretive items. This will improve the entire area around the Basilica.

“It is our hope that this prayer garden will provide people of all faiths with knowledge about the Church’s long history in Baltimore and with a space for quiet prayer and reflection. That it is located in the shadows of the architectural symbol of religious freedom should not be lost on any of us,” the Cardinal concluded.