

# Boston Mixed-Income Development Bolsters Community

2021 MFE Awards, Mixed-Income, Grand: A.O. Flats at Forest Hills

By [Donna Kimura](#)



*Bruce Martin*

## PROJECT DETAILS

---

**Location:** Boston

**Developer:** The Community Builders

**Architect:** The Architectural Team

**Builder:** Bilt-Rite Construction

**Interior Designer:** The Architectural Team

**Opened:** September 2020

**Number of Units:** 78

**Unit Mix:** Studios; one-, two-, and three-bedrooms

**Rents:** \$1,274 to \$2,760

A once-vacant Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) parcel in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood has been transformed into an eco-friendly, mixed-income housing development.

The 78-unit development features 38 workforce housing units and 40 affordable units for residents earning no more than 60% of the area median income (AMI). Eight affordable units are set aside for formerly homeless families earning no more than 30% of the AMI.

A.O. Flats at Forest Hills also provides more than 1,600 square feet of ground-floor retail and 2,500 square feet of community space.

The Community Builders, a leading nonprofit developer, brought in The Architectural Team (TAT) to design the project. The team created a five-story podium building that fits into the surrounding low-rise neighborhood while significantly enhancing the streetscape and pedestrian experience.

“One of our primary design goals with A.O. Flats at Forest Hills was to create a community that feels very much in keeping with the urban fabric of Jamaica Plain,” says Reed Harmon, project manager at TAT. “This is an infill project built on a vacant and contaminated MBTA parcel. From an urban design perspective, the site presented a great opportunity, because the building in fact serves as a buffer between the adjacent rail lines and the rest of the neighborhood—the effect

is to fill a gap in the streetscape and make the surrounding developments feel even more cohesive.”

Working on a narrow parcel, the team created a long linear building, with the massing organized with two distinct elements. The end nearing a nearby train station embodies a larger, commercial scale, giving it a more urban and civic presence. The balance of the building reflects a more residential feel, says TAT. The team also incorporated a publicly accessible pocket park onto the site.

In accordance with Boston’s Green Affordable Housing Program, the development utilizes high-efficiency heating and cooling systems and Energy Star-rated appliances and materials as well as features solar panels.

In addition, the site’s location minimizes the need for resident automobile use and encourages walking, cycling, and the utilization of mass transit. The community is within walking distance of the Forest Hills MBTA Station, the Arnold Arboretum, the Southwest Corridor Park, local restaurants, and cultural venues. To further encourage alternative transportation methods, the project team provided one bike space per unit.

The development gets its name from two local landmarks—A for Arborway from the Arnold Arboretum and O for Orange from the Orange transit line.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Donna Kimura](#)

Donna Kimura is deputy editor of Affordable Housing Finance. She has covered the industry for more than a decade. Before that, she worked at an Internet company and several daily newspapers. Connect with Donna at [dkimura@zondahome.com](mailto:dkimura@zondahome.com) or follow her [@DKimura\\_AHF](#).