

# Emilio Dorcely, CEO of Urban Edge, discusses the future

**Richard Heath**  
Staff Reporter

Emilio Dorcely has been the CEO of Urban Edge since September 2019 and he said one of the things he really worries about is the housing dichotomy.

“There is a dire need for affordable housing for the 30 percent to 40 percent area median income (AMI), but that’s only part of the solution,” he told The Bulletin in a 90-minute conversation at Urban Edge on April 26.

“There should be affordable homeownership too,” he said. “Homeownership goes back to the fundamental fact that this builds wealth in the community, it increases the opportunity to build wealth for people of color.”

Dorcely recognizes that for many people affordable rental at 30 percent and affordable homeownership for those earning 60 percent to 70 percent are a dichotomy.

“Affordable homeownership and affordable rental should not be either-or it should be an AND.”

Dorcely believes that affordable rental housing and affordable homeownership both build stability in a community.

“Neighborhood stability is crucial,” he said. “But what if I rent and I want to own and I can’t afford that in my own community? There should be [rental and ownership] affordable units in every building not just in one building.”

“When I first came here the vast majority of [low income affordable] units were in the center area.”

Dorcely said he agrees with the phrase ‘islands among the gentrification’ but also understands why.

“I know that many times when I talk to community members their biggest fear is mixed-income housing,” Dorcely said.

“They believe that mixed-income housing is the beginning of the push-out. Higher income means that it’s not for people of color. It’s not unreasonable but it doesn’t have to be that way.”

Dorcely came to Boston from Brooklyn where he was CEO of Bridge Street Development Corporation, a faith-based social housing organization founded in 1995 by the Bridge Street African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church. He said it was there he worked to bridge the gap between affordable rental housing and promoting affordable home ownership.

He said he’s focused on three Urban Edge projects. One is the completion of Holtzer Park at 137 Amory Street, 62 units of fully affordable rental apartments on the six-acre 125 Amory Street campus.

Work began in December of 2019 shortly after Dorcely began at Urban Edge. “And we expect move-ins in June,” he said. “We’re closing on construction for 1599 Columbus Avenue,” he said ticking off number two. “It’s 65 units of fully affordable rental.”

Approved by the BPDA in December 2019 and the Boston Zoning Board of Appeals in January 2020, Dorcely said it was delayed by staff capacity.



Emilio Dorcely  
CEO of Urban Edge.

“We hope to break ground later this year.”

The third project was the refinancing and major renovation of the 78-unit, two-building Bragdon-Dixwell apartments.

Funded at \$38.3 million from MassHousing, the two buildings at opposite ends of Egleston Square were among the first multi-family preservation projects for Urban Edge in 1984.

Between 1981 and 1983 Urban Edge shifted its housing edge and its office for first time homebuyers at its 379 Centre St. storefront to Egleston Square, that was back then dotted with abandoned, Federal Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-foreclosed apartment buildings.

Dorcely thinks that the next edge is at the Roxbury-Jamaica Plain crossroads with more affordable homeownership opportunities for people who want to move up but not move out because they can’t afford the mortgage.

Dorcely sees Mildred Hailey Apartments as an apotheosis of

this new edge. As reported by The Bulletin, Urban Edge is in partnership with The Community Builders (TCB) and the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Community Development Corporation (JPNDC) to completely redesign and rebuild Mildred Hailey Apartments over the next decade. While not includ-

ing homeownership, it does focus on mixed-income that Dorcely thinks is the ideal.

“We’re going to build replacement housing for 250 low-income residents. The vast majority will be affordable.”

Dorcely

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