

Big happenings all over town won BPDA approval this week

The board green lit a massive re-do of the Simmons University campus in the Fenway, a lab campus at WBZ-TV's studio in Allston, and long-planned projects in Roxbury and South Boston.

By [Catherine Carlock](#) Globe Staff, Updated January 20, 2023, 1:56 p.m.



Brookline Avenue near Longwood Medical Area could look quite different in a decade if plans approved by the BPDA Thursday for what is now Simmons University's residential campus come to fruition. SASAKI

The Boston Planning and Development Agency board on Thursday approved nearly \$2 billion worth of projects across the city, paving the way for more than 3-4 million square feet of life-science laboratory space, renovation of historic turbine halls in a decommissioned power plant in South Boston, and the development of the largest remaining parcel of land in the BPDA's portfolio - Roxbury's 7.7-acre Parcel 3.

The lab approvals in South Boston, Allston, Fort Point, Roxbury, and Fenway come at a time when life science demand is [tempering throughout the region](#). Developers say they expect purpose-built labs to still be successful in the long run.

Simmons University won approval to consolidate its two Boston campuses near Longwood Medical Area, clearing space for Skanska to build a 1.7 million-square-foot lab and residential project on Simmons' residential campus at 305 Brookline Ave. The project was approved as a planned development area, with individual buildings still needing BPDA sign-off.

Simmons aims to start construction on a 21-story dormitory, dining hall, and athletics facility later this year and move in by 2026. Skanska could then start phased construction on three life-science labs and 388 residential units in two buildings with an underground parking garage along at 305 Brookline Ave., an expected decade-long buildout.

"One Simmons' is the most profound strategy in our history" and is crucial to the ongoing operations of what is one of the only remaining women's institutions in the country, said Laura Brink Pisinski, vice president of university real estate and facilities management. "If it isn't possible, then Simmons won't be possible."

The project prompted more than two hours of public commentary, with most of the opposition coming from those who argued shadows cast by the future buildings would damage park space in the adjacent Emerald Necklace. Developer Skanska and architect Sasaki refuted those claims, saying they plan a \$7 million contribution to the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, setting aside \$1 million for a shadow study.

The board also gave formal approval to HYM and My City At Peace [as developers of Parcel 3 in Roxbury](#), where the team plans 700,000 square feet of labs and 466 condos and apartments.

National Development and The Mount Vernon Co.'s long-planned lab campus at WBZ-1V's studio on Soldiers Field

Road in Allston also won approval. The developers plan three labs, spanning 700,000 square feet, and an 85-unit

residential building, which will set aside 20 percent of units at affordable rates. National and Mount Vernon already won approval to replace WBZ's studio, which was built in 1948.

Ted Tye, managing partner of National Development, said buildout of the three labs would take up to a decade and wouldn't start until the WBZ studio is built. "We're really bullish on it over time, but [cognizant of where the market is today](#)," Tye said.

Redgate and Hilco Redevelopment Partners were approved to develop the first phase of their major mixed-use redevelopment of the decommissioned Boston Edison power plant in South Boston: 612,000 square feet of labs in two buildings, three renovated turbine halls at the former coal-fired plant, and a waterfront promenade fronting the 15-acre site along the Reserved Channel, connecting what's now a break in the Boston Harborwalk.

The BPDA board also approved a 95,000-square-foot lab at 7 Channel Center in South Boston, 35 income-restricted senior housing units at a former church at 207 E St. in South Boston, 24 condos at 26 Coffey St. in Dorchester, and took a procedural step to [further the MBTA's plan](#) to buy the industrial Widett Circle.

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