

Boston's only trailer park to get a facelift

May 20, 2011|By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent, Globe Staff

After a hard-fought, 25-year battle to move from tenants to landowners, residents of Boston's only trailer park will soon begin major improvements to basic utilities following years of neglect.

"It seems like forever," said 78-year-old Pauline McLaughlin, a Mattapan native who has lived 43 years at the 104-unit Boston Trailer Park off the VFW Parkway in a sliver of West Roxbury near the Dedham line. "We are now the masters of our own domain. If there any problems now it will be our own fault. We're in control. That is what we've been waiting for years."



The residents took ownership of the trailer park earlier this year. Now, they are in line for \$815,000 in infrastructure renovations to water, electric and road service they hope will be in place by summer's end.

Today, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and city officials will attend a groundbreaking at the park, which is home to between 150 and 175 residents, many of whom live in affordable housing. It will be the residents' second celebration, after they gathered for a party at a local Elks Club Wednesday to celebrate their latest milestone.

"This investment will maintain this Park as a viable space for affordable housing in the City for years to come," Menino's office said in a statement.

The long saga began in 1987, when abutting car dealership owner James E. "Ernie" Clair purchased the park's property with the intent of expanding his business over the entire 13-acre plot along the Charles River. Residents pushed back by forming a tenants association.

Years of uncertainty, lawsuits and protests led to a deal reached seven years ago with the city's help to preserve nine acres of the park. The other four acres were kept by Clair's business. The 2004 agreement donated the downsized park land to nonprofit developers, with The Community Builders, Inc. as its interim owner. A purchase and sale agreement was signed by the tenants' association two years ago, and, in mid-February the tenants closed on the deal through the help of city grants and other financing.

In all, it cost \$3.1 million to acquire the property, and each resident association member became a partial landowner. "It was a big relief," recalled McLaughlin, president of the resident association and a board member since 1987. "It's been a long, complicated process."

During the whole ordeal, the park's basic utilities fell into disrepair. Some upgrades were done to a portion of the park during 2006 when 33 units were relocated off the four acres acquired by the car dealership. "They did some, but not a lot," McLaughlin said. Most of the water and sewage pipes and electrical wiring were installed in 1947 when the park was formed. The park has never had paved roadways. Its dirt and gravel roads are in "dreadful shape," she added.

While the past 25 years have left her cautious about calling anything a guarantee, McLaughlin expressed gratitude to the many hands that have helped along the way and some reserved excitement. "It's going in the right direction, at least," she said. E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.