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## **GREENHOUSE HELPS DRIVE GROWTH IN ROXBURY**

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A rare commercial project is taking root in Roxbury to cultivate an exotic edible and help drive economic growth in the neighborhood.

By late June, a recently completed \$1.2 million commercial greenhouse will start growing green garlic to sell to restaurants and food markets. Traditionally a springtime crop, the scallion-like bulb will be harvested year-round in this 10,000-square-foot facility and distributed by West Kingston, R.I., garlic producer Ophios LLC, said its chief executive, Peter Sellew. Sellew said he hopes to outfit the greenhouse next month with growing benches, lights, irrigation, and fertilization systems.

This unusual greenhouse located about seven blocks from the Dudley Square commercial district was financed by the state Highway Department to compensate the city for salt and oil pollution it caused 10 years ago. In about two weeks, the department will transfer ownership of the greenhouse to the **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative Inc.**, the nonprofit community planning agency that conceived the project, said Highway Department spokesman Jon Carlisle. "I don't know of any other new commercial greenhouses in a US city developed by a community group for economic growth," said Michelle Thompson, who has been a real estate consultant on the greenhouse project and is a visiting professor at Cornell University. She added: "It's the start of an agribusiness center and down the line, the goal is to produce enough fresh produce in the **neighborhood** to make a whole salad."

The 21-year-old DSNI has taken over approximately 450 municipally owned vacant lots and purchased another 200. In consultation with Roxbury residents, businesses, and religious groups, it drew up a neighborhood redevelopment plan, then guided the planning, permitting, and choice of developers to convert those derelict lots and other properties into 850 permanently affordable housing units, six public green spaces, and a community center.

"The greenhouse, our first commercial project, will hire a local manager and staff plus help us attract other commercial developers and new businesses," said John Barros, DSNI's executive director, who expects to generate more development funds by selling naming rights to the greenhouse, which stands on the site of a former auto body shop.

"We're using our real estate to grow the local economy with anchor businesses like the greenhouse that don't displace existing businesses or residents," said Barros.

In the late 1990s, DSNI, residents, and other community groups decided to develop a commercial greenhouse as a way to promote job growth, urban agriculture, and healthy food.

"By creating better uses for property, it increases all values and changes perceptions of what's acceptable development in Roxbury," said David Abromowitz, a partner at the law firm Goulston & Storrs P.C., which does free legal work for DSNI.

Its next venture with a commercial component, approved April 28 by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, is the \$17 million Dudley Village: 50 housing units with 15,000 square feet of ground-floor retail and offices to be built by the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corp., said

Barros.

The group has also approved a \$5 million office building that Project Hope Inc. will construct to provide women's education and job training.

DSNI is also seeking commercial developers for sites around the Uphams Corner stop of the MBTA Fairmont Line.

Barros's **neighborhood** has ridden several real estate cycles.

"In the 1970s, it was suburban flight and arson for profit," he recalled. "In the 1980s, it was crime and how to plan for development. Now that property values are up, the question is: Will a long-supportive city respect the community's right to plan more commercial development?"