

Frequently Asked Questions about RMDC's Caird Redevelopment Project?

Who is Rocky Mountain Development Council—the project sponsor?

RMDC is a nonprofit organization that exists to raise and manage funds to solve community needs and problems. We include Head Start, the Senior Center, the Low Income Energy Assistance Program, volunteers programs, mental health programs, Meals on Wheels, and much more.

Why is RMDC developing housing?

We've been building affordable housing for people on limited incomes for a long time: Eagles Manor, Pheasant Glen, Ptarmigan, and currently Big Boulder in Boulder. We are able to bring grant funds for housing into the community for which private developers are not eligible. Housing is a part of our mission.

Does Helena need more housing?

A host of concrete sources confirm just how desperate Helena is for rental housing that ordinary folks can afford: the 2010 Helena Area Housing Needs Assessment; waiting lists for senior housing; census statistics about our aging populations.

Will this be senior or family housing?

The first 30-unit phase will be built for senior citizens. Given Lewis & Clark County's unusually high senior population that's our first priority. Continued homework and community conversations will inform us about the needs we should most serve in the next phases.

Malfunction Junction is a busy site. Why are we locating this project there?

Open 3-acre sites in the heart of Helena are hard to find, but offer the best services for residents and the community: transportation, infrastructure, convenience. Outlying areas isolate folks from help and work. The Caird community sits within Helena's HATS transportation system—and within walking distance to groceries and pharmacies (2 to the Real Food Store and 6 to Walgreens, Safeway, and CVS). Architects and engineers are great at building soundproof structures and designing layouts so that a busy corner becomes interesting not a nuisance. All housing will be set away from Montana Ave.

What about the site's toxic soil?

Lewis & Clark County's 2009 detailed environmental study explains that the toxic materials on the Caird site are close to the surface, not in the ground water, and can be removed for about \$200,000. We'll team up with the County to clean up this Brownsfield site—a health benefit to Helena.

Who will live in the Caird Residences?

Our residents will include older adults living on Social Security benefits of \$500 to \$1,200 a month. Those folks include the people who taught our children, nursed us at the hospital, or served us at the grocery store.

What will the per-unit cost be?

The current per unit estimate for this phase (design work is preliminary) is about \$240,000. There's a reason for that cost. Federally funding housing must meet stringent standards for accessibility, security, fire suppression. Those standards are reflected in the price, along with the costs of underground parking, open space landscaping, legal fees, and intentionally welcoming design.

Will RMDC stay involved in this project after it's built?

Currently, RMDC manages properties we build and remodel. We do so in order to insure that we serve our clients thoughtfully and maintain the investment we've made to communities.

Will there be commercial development along Montana?

We're leaving that option open for the Montana Avenue side. Stores and offices that benefit tenants and neighbors would fit grant guidelines well.

What will this housing community look like?

We've had some preliminary artist sketches, but are still considering height and design. Anticipate clean, bright, well-built, interesting buildings—where anyone might want to live. Anticipate a "gateway" look that transforms this eyesore into a community landmark. Anticipate green space. Anticipate a complex that reflects current senior thinking to age in place, walk, and contribute to a sustainable community.

When does RMDC hope to begin work?

The Caird property—once a very vital part of Helena's economy—has stood largely unused and deteriorating for a long time now. We hope to complete purchase and begin clean up within 2011—and in doing so put construction folks to work, inject cash into our economy, house seniors safely, and change the look of a gateway corner.

How can I stay involved in project planning and discussion?

Email mrude@rmdc.net to tell us your thoughts and receive updates and bulletins. We welcome your ideas on design, traffic, related needs. Thanks.

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