

United Way of Central Ohio's downtown Columbus HQ to be redeveloped by The Community Builders, Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority

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The United Way of Central Ohio has selected the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority and a national nonprofit developer to purchase and transform its downtown headquarters.



Boston-based The Community Builders and CMHA will buy the site on South 3rd Street for \$4 million. They plan to build a 12-story mixed-use project, dubbed AspireColumbus, that will include 135

apartments at various rates and about 30,000 square feet of commercial space.

The United Way solicited proposals [this past winter](#) for its current headquarters at 360 S. 3rd St., looking for projects with a focus on affordable housing. The organization plans to move at the end of this year to an as-yet undisclosed space it will share with other nonprofits.

"We really wanted to use the site to help solve some of our community's problems and affordable housing is definitely at the top of the list," United Way President and CEO Lisa Courtice said. "Housing authorities don't usually get to develop on prime property, so this is rare."

The project is expected to cost \$70 million to build, with an expected completion date of late 2025 or early 2026, according to CMHA.

CMHA COO [Scott Scharlach](#) said a development like this in downtown Columbus could be revolutionary.

"This will be a catalyst for other mixed-income development in downtown," he told *Columbus Business First*.

At least a quarter of units will be for households earning less than \$20,000, at least 15% of units will be for households earning less than \$40,000, another 15% of units will be for households earning less than \$55,000 and the remaining units will have no income restriction.

Preliminary market-rate rents are estimated to be between \$1,150 and \$2,300. Households earning less than \$20,000 will get a rent subsidy to ensure they pay less than 30% of their income for housing.

All units will have the same finishes.



Residents would have access to services offered through CMHA's new [Resident Initiatives for Success & Empowerment Center](#), which offers rental assistance, food assistance, help finding employment and health services. The project is also slated to include a daycare.

[Bob Bitzenhofer](#), vice president for planning and development for CMHA, said the housing authority hopes this downtown development breaks stereotypes around what affordable housing looks like.

"Affordable housing can fit into the downtown fabric and become part of the Columbus skyline," Bitzenhofer said.

Meet The Community Builders

Boston-based TCB, which opened its Columbus office in 2019, has built more than 33,000 mixed-income multifamily housing developments across the country. It will serve as the project's co-developer, while CMHA will lead the overall development, including programming, design and construction oversight.

"Our partnership with CMHA combines national experience with local knowledge to expand housing opportunity for Columbus residents and spark new business investments. We share the values of the United Way and look forward to making Columbus an even more inclusive and vibrant city," said [Jeff Beam](#), TCB's regional vice president for real estate development.

Funding sources for AspireColumbus will include New Markets Tax Credits equity, traditional debt, CMHA funding, Low-Income Housing Tax Credit equity and potential "gap" funding from state and local partners, Beam told *Business First*.

Moody Nolan is the architect for the project.

Courtice said this project was selected because all three firms – CMHA, TCB and Moody Nolan – "have a depth of talent and experience."

"This was a really comprehensive proposal," Courtice said. "(TCB) is really about building community, their amenities will be great for residents there and they are a nice complement to (CMHA's) ability to put funding together."



What does affordable housing look like in Columbus?

The announcement of the project comes at a time the region is seeing [a shortage of all types of housing, especially affordable housing](#).

Only 29 affordable housing units are available for every 100 extremely low-income households in the Columbus and Franklin County area. In Franklin County, roughly 54,000 families spend more than half of their income on housing, according to data from the Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio.

"The Columbus region is experiencing a housing crisis," Erin Prosser, assistant director of housing strategies for Columbus, said in a media release. "Without meaningful action, this problem will persist, and many of our most vulnerable residents will continue to be impacted the most. This is an example of an innovative partnership that will bring 135 mixed-income units into our downtown neighborhood, more than half of which will be affordable to those households earning less than \$55,000 per-year."

In June, [Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther outlined the Columbus Housing Strategy](#), which calls for creating more housing units at all price points and directing city resources towards the problem.