



A 140-unit affordable apartment development could be coming to a large vacant downtown site owned by Marquette

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A 140-unit affordable apartment development is planned for a large vacant downtown site owned by Marquette University.

Known as Michigan Street Commons, it would be built on around 7 acres bordered mainly by North Lovell, North 10th, West Michigan and West Clybourn streets.

Meanwhile, a historic downtown building that already features affordable apartments could be getting more than 30 additional units.

Kenosha-based Bear Development LLC is seeking affordable housing tax credits from the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority to help finance Michigan Street Commons.

Information released by WHEDA said the project would have 140 affordable apartments.

The authority didn't provide a specific location, and Bear Development Chief Executive Officer S.R. Mills couldn't be immediately reached Monday for more information.

Ald. Robert Bauman said the project is being proposed for the Marquette-owned property.

The Common Council and Mayor Tom Barrett in November approved mixed-use zoning for the site.

The university at that time said it didn't have specific plans for the site, according to Lora Strigens, vice president for planning and facilities management.

She said at a Nov. 9 Plan Commission hearing that the zoning change provides flexibility "for great urban development on that site."

The site is mostly vacant parcels and parking lots, as well as a 132,300-square-foot office building that is largely vacant.

The rezoning didn't include two adjacent properties: an office building, at 525 N. Sixth St., which houses a Department of Psychology program, and a former Ramada Hotel, 633 W. Michigan St., which the university has had plans to demolish.



The university in 2016 announced plans to demolish all the buildings, including the hotel and Sixth Street office building, to develop a \$120 million Athletic and Human Performance Research Center with \$40 million from Aurora Health Care Inc.

That plan was later dropped, and Marquette in 2019 instead opened a \$24 million, 46,000-square-foot Athletic and Human Performance Research Center at 1201 W. Wells St.

Michigan Street Commons is among 54 proposed affordable housing developments, totaling 3,213 units throughout Wisconsin, that are competing for state and federal tax credits in 2021, according to WHEDA.

The proposals are seeking tax credits totaling \$57.7 million, WHEDA said. But the agency likely will have around \$31.9 million to distribute.

The tax credits are usually sold to raise cash, with developers seeking bank loans and other funding sources to complete their financing packages.

Developers that receive tax credits must generally provide at least 85% of a building's apartments at below-market rents to people earning no higher than 80% of the local median income.

Other proposals not previously disclosed include a plan to develop 38 apartments, including 32 units set aside at affordable rents, at the Century Building, 808 N. Old World Third St.

In 2018, the building's third, fourth, fifth and sixth floors were converted from small offices to 44 one- and two-bedroom apartments, with retail and office space on the first and second floor.

Developer Cal Schultz initially planned to also convert the top two floors of the eight-story building into apartments.

But, Legal Action of Wisconsin Inc. was leasing that space for its Milwaukee offices.

However, Legal Action recently moved to the Clark Building, 633 W. Wisconsin Ave. And that frees up space for additional apartments.

Schultz said Monday he also plans to convert the building's second floor commercial space to apartments.