

# CCH details 'Renaissance Uptown Lofts'

■ 98 affordable housing apartments plus storefront retail planned for Colfax and Pearl; advisory council seeks members

BY VANESSA MARTIN

About 30 people attended a public meeting held on June 24 at the Pathways Church, 16th & Pearl, concerning the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) plan to develop 98 apartments for low-income and homeless residents on the northwest corner of Colfax & Pearl at 551 E. Colfax.

Hosted by District 10 City Councilwoman Jeanne Robb, District 8 Councilwoman Carla Madison, Capitol Hill United Neighborhoods (CHUN) and The Unsinkables, the 75-minute meeting ended with CCH president John Parvensky agreeing to work with the community to form an advisory council and create a "good neighbor" agreement to work on issues related to the project, which is to be called the Renaissance Uptown Lofts.

"We can't identify every problem before it happens, that's why we have an open door policy (with the public)," Parvensky said at the meeting. "While there has been some (neighborhood) anxiety about some of our projects before they open, as soon as they open that anxiety goes away because the neighbors can come to us."

Councilwoman Madison was the only person present to express major concern about the project and the existing concentration of about 1,000 low-income housing units within a quarter-mile radius of the site.

Kaye Siemers, who lives on Pearl and is a former board chair of the now defunct Uptown Partnership, replied, "I am in favor of this project. I know there will be issues, but we have a moral imperative to provide housing. It's the right thing to do."



*COURTESY OF HUMPHRIES POLI ARCHITECTS*

*THE 'RENAISSANCE UPTOWN LOFTS' planned by the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless for Colfax & Pearl, here seen in a rendering looking from the southeast, will be comprised of nearly 100 apartments along with some storefront retail on Colfax.*

While CCH has developed more than 1,500 units of affordable housing in metro Denver in the past decade, it hasn't kept pace with the amount that has been lost over the past 30 years.

In 2003 the Denver Homeless Planning Group's "Blueprint for Addressing Homelessness in Denver" stated that during the past 27 years, Denver has lost

2,665 affordable housing units.

In downtown Denver alone, 34 residential hotels were demolished to make way for new office buildings, Coors Field and the Colorado Convention Center, and another 18 residential hotels were closed.

In addition to the disappearing affordable housing units, in 1983 the federal Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) changed its focus from developing affordable housing to providing subsidies for existing units, essentially grinding to a halt Denver's efforts to keep up with the demand for new affordable housing.

Today, gentrification in areas such as Capitol Hill and Uptown has replaced affordable housing with more expensive units. Additionally, the downturn in the economy has cut funding for groups that provide affordable housing, and now city officials, state and federal programs and local neighborhood groups are trying to find ways to meet the increased need for affordable housing.

A subsidiary of the CCH, the Renaissance Housing Development Corporation (RHDC) integrates formerly homeless families and individuals into mixed-income housing developments to enhance the neighborhoods in which they are located.

The Renaissance Uptown Lofts is the group's latest affordable housing project and is being modeled after its other housing developments, the Renaissance Off-Broadway Lofts at 2135 Stout and its Renaissance Riverfront Lofts, currently under construction at 3440 Park Ave. West.

The five-story development at Colfax & Pearl will have 92 one-bedroom apartments averaging 550 sf, three studio apartments, and three two-bedroom apartments. All units will have full kitchens, bathrooms, closets, air-conditioning, CAT-5 cabling, and appliances, while some will have "Juliet" balconies.

The building will have on-site laundry facilities, video surveillance systems, secure access, elevator service, and a computer room. There will be a second-floor community room with a common kitchen and a courtyard that looks west across the alley, allowing the residents to enjoy the outdoors while having privacy.

CCH will be building the Renaissance Uptown Lofts in accordance with Green Communities guidelines established by the Enterprise Foundation. Low-volatile organic finishing compounds will be used for paints, sealants and carpeting. All appliances will be Energy Star rated, compact florescents will be used for all lighting, and 141 solar-powered photovoltaic panels will be mounted on the roof to help the building be more energy efficient. Additionally, insulation will exceed requirements and the windows will be UV tinted.

Four stories of residential units will sit above one level of ground-floor retail that will front Colfax, with 40 parking spaces directly behind it.

About 40% of the units (37) will go to individuals participating in CCH's "Housing First" program, which works with the chronically homeless by first providing them with permanent housing and support services.

Parvensky said people who want to live in the Renaissance Uptown Lofts will have to sign a six-month lease and will have an on-site manager and case managers working with them.

"We've had people who have moved in (to this type of housing) who have then started to complain about the homeless," Parvensky said at the June 24 meeting. "They become part of the community."

The remaining 55 Renaissance Uptown Lofts units will go to low-income individuals earning less than 60% of the Area Mean Income (AMI). The current AMI is \$30,000 for a single individual and \$34,000 for a couple, so the maximum qualifying 60% income would be \$18,000 for an individual and \$20,400 for a couple.

Parvensky said rents for low-income residents would range from \$400-\$700 month and interested residents would need to apply, undergo a background check, and have their incomes verified.

When the project was announced last October, CCH received a letter from CHUN's Historic Preservation Committee asking it to preserve the facade of the 1923 building at the site. CCH has worked with the project designer, Humphries Poli Architects, to do that.

The Renaissance Uptown Lofts will be built under Main Street 3 zoning. MS-3 is the most dense of all the Main Street zones and was created to encourage a mix of housing, office and commercial uses... and a pedestrian-friendly environment... along East Colfax and other transit-rich commercial corridors.

Like adjacent blocks along Colfax, currently the sidewalk in front of 551 E. Colfax from the curb to the building is 10'. At the June 24 public meeting, Eric Blasé, an associate with Humphries Poli, said that the city wanted the sidewalk to be wider and the wastewater department wanted the property to be elevated more because of concerns about flooding.

The compromise the two parties developed was to move the building back seven feet and have pedestrians walk up three steps to the retail entrances. There will be a handicap-accessible entrance off the alley for all the retail spaces. Additionally, new trees and grates will be added along the sidewalk.

Blasé said they intend to reuse as much of the original facade materials as possible and will recreate others using modern products. He said that many of the original pilasters are not in great shape and will need to be replicated, and that after looking at historic photos they plan to rebuild elements that have been lost over the years to modifications such as new storefronts.

The replicated facade will face Colfax and extend 15' along the sides of the building. On Pearl, painted siding and stucco will be used to provide the feeling of entering a residential neighborhood.

In designing the new building, a darker recess is being used to separate the first floor of the project from the housing units, offsetting the facade. White windows that project 18" will be used. The exterior will also include brick and some metals.

MS-3 zoning requires one parking space for every 500 sf of retail space, thus requiring the project to provide 13.5 parking spaces for its retail. MS-3 projects built as "housing that is affordable for persons with 40% Area Mean Income and below" and "other special needs housing," as this one will be, are required to provide only one parking space per four units. Therefore, the Renaissance Uptown Lofts is required to have just 24.5 (98/4) parking spaces for its residential units, for a total parking requirement of 38 spaces.

It will provide 40 spaces. Primary access to retail parking will be off of Pearl, with access to the residential parking from the alley.

CCH's Parvensky said his organization is negotiating with a retail developer to purchase the retail space and that group will be responsible for managing that part of the project.

Todd Bloom, owner of the Sidney Lawrence Group, said he was working on bringing retail to the development that would appeal to the entire neighborhood. His vision includes a restaurant on the corner of Colfax & Pearl that serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, a coffeeshop, a dry-cleaner and a florist.

CCH and RHDC created the Uptown Lofts Housing Corp., which bought the building for \$2.2 million in June. The total cost for the project is expected to be \$16 million, with \$10 million coming from the Colorado Housing Finance Authority's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program.

Using that program private investors will invest \$10 million through CCH's Limited Liability Company to support the project while taking advantage of tax credits for 18 years, when CCH will own the building outright.

"These investors are pretty savvy and they want to make sure their investment is properly maintained and operated successfully, so they will make site visits every six to 12 months," Parvensky said.

Additional funding will come through Section 8 subsidies and CCH also has requests in for funding from Denver's Road Home, the city, and other sources.

Parvensky said he expects construction on the Renaissance Uptown Lofts to begin in the early winter of 2009 and finish in 13 months. The project still has to be reviewed by the city's Community Planning & Development Agency, which will take about three months, and then have permits issued, which should consume another three months.

The builder will be Alliance Construction Solutions, which just completed the Hilton Gardens Hotel near the Colorado Convention Center. The current billboard at the site will be removed.

Those interested in serving on the Renaissance Uptown Lofts advisory board, touring another CCH affordable housing residence, or meeting with an on-site manager can email [cch@coloradocoalition.org](mailto:cch@coloradocoalition.org).