Introducing

Clara Brown Commons

A Guide for Generosity from Mile High Ministries

Summer 2020

Affordable Housing...

• A safe and caring community where residents can stabilize their lives, expand their economic capacity, and deepen spiritual connectedness
• A dynamic array of supportive services
• Integrated with Denver’s historic Cole neighborhood
• A privately-funded response to Denver’s housing and homelessness crisis
We are excited to announce a new endeavor that many of you have already been praying for: Clara Brown Commons!

Clara Brown Commons (CBC) will be a “transformational community” with 61 apartments (for rent), 17 townhomes (for sale) and a community center on a full city block in northeast Denver’s Cole neighborhood. We’ll be ideally situated next to a lovely park, right on a major bus line, and across the street from our long-time partner, Inner City Health Center. CBC is an ideal location to create safe and compassionate community where we can stabilize our lives, expand our economic capacity, and deepen our spiritual connectedness.

We’ll build a supportive community at CBC with tools we’ve been developing for decades, including at Joshua Station: on-site counseling and chaplaincy; mission-driven residential staff and volunteers; community meals; children and youth programming (ECE, after-school tutoring, recreation, counseling and play therapy).

All CBC homes will be permanently affordable for people whose income is below the Area Median Income (AMI)—with a large portion for households under 30% of AMI. CBC will be an ideal home for families who graduate from Joshua Station!

The entire price tag will be $31.7 million. The great news—and current challenge—is that we need to raise just $400,000 to complete the capital campaign and start building Clara Brown Commons!

I’ve lived just down the street from the CBC property for more than 25 years, praying and dreaming with neighbors for something better than blight and violence on that block. Will you prayerfully consider joining us to make this place of hope a reality with your own generous gift?

To help spark your prayers as you consider how to participate, why don’t you come and walk the property with me sometime? As we take in the fresh air, let’s dream together about what it will look like when Clara Brown Commons is one of the best places to live in our part of the city!

In Christ,

Jeff Johnsen
Executive Director
Russell Square Apartments are built to house military medical supply workers.

The apartments fall into disrepair under an irresponsible owner.

Jeff Johnsen begins daily walks around this blighted block that attracted crime and violence to his neighborhood. He talks with neighbors and starts praying regularly, “God, liberate this land. We could build something good here, especially for our poorest neighbors. If not us, allow someone else to benefit the community.”

Jeff and others begin drawing a master plan for a transformational housing community—with no idea of how it might be possible. Other developers present upscale concepts to city council, but the Cole Neighborhood Association pushes back: “We want affordable housing in our neighborhood!”

 Neighbor Sandy Douglas introduces us to friends on her block and shares our vision. Ray Stranske, co-founder of Hope Communities and longtime leader in faith-based affordable housing, provides consulting and encouragement.

The property owner is sentenced to prison for tax evasion and corruption.

The property owner returns to prison for violating probation. Denver forecloses on the property, which has over $1 million in liens after decades of unpaid fines. We name the project “Clara Brown Commons” to honor a 19th century local pioneer and philanthropist. We host a project design “charrette” event sponsored by Housing Colorado and University of Colorado at Denver. A team of architects, engineers, and neighbors begin turning our dream into a plan for apartments, townhomes, retail, and a community center.
Milestones continued

2017

A family foundation wins a highly competitive auction, purchases the property for $4.65 million, and offers to hold it for $1/year until we are ready to purchase and build. Ray Stranske is hired to lead the development effort.

2018

Studio Completiva is chosen as architect for the project, and Alliance Builders as general contractor. We begin a $4.1M capital campaign with the leadership of our board of directors and a small handful of friends eager to kick off the generosity.

2019

Russell Square Apartments are demolished, and neighbors celebrate. City Council approves re-zoning. The Anschutz Foundation approves a $1M grant contingent upon MHM raising the balance of capital campaign funds, and TyL Foundation offers to match every new donation up to $1M. The Colorado Trust and a private family foundation make impact investments (very low interest loans). All this translates into affordability for future residents such as graduating Joshua Station families!

2020

Capital campaign enters a more public phase to raise the remaining $400K needed in philanthropy, so that MHM can purchase the land held by our partner foundation.

We apply for $11.1M in Low Income Housing Tax Credits (August, with notification in December). This popular and competitive financing vehicle incentivizes private investors in exchange for federal tax reductions.

2021

Construction financing, equity investor, and design processes are underway.

2022

Apartment construction begins. Habitat for Humanity begins construction of for-sale townhomes. Tenant leasing begins.

2023

Grand Opening of Clara Brown Commons!

2024

Community center construction and opening. The Clara Brown Commons project is designated “stabilized,” and permanent financing is put in place.
**The Plan Comes Together**

**Project Total:** $31.7 M

**Income Sources**

1. **Tax Credit Investors** • $11.1M
2. **Mortgage** • $6.2M
3. **Townhome Sales** • $4.6M
4. **Capital Campaign** • $4.1M
5. **Low-interest loans** • $2.6M
6. **Local Government Patient Loans** • $2.3M
7. **Deferred Developer Fee** • $0.8M

**Your Part?**

Just $400,000 to go! It’s the home stretch for our capital campaign.

*Can you help us get ready to build?*

**NOTES** • Capital Campaign: $3.7M has already been given or pledged. **Townhomes:** This represents the cost of 17 homes developed by a non-profit partner and sold to qualified lower-income buyers. MHM does not have to raise funds for this portion of the project. **Low Interest Loans:** $1.25M given or pledged; $1M under discussion. **Local Government Patient Loans:** Forgivable loans from the City and State. **Deferred Developer Fee:** This is MHM’s contribution to the project, by deferring the fee we would normally earn for developing the property.
Clara Brown was a Colorado pioneer, entrepreneur, and philanthropist who helped make Colorado what it is today. She was born into slavery in Virginia in 1800. She married another slave, Richard, in 1818 and together they had four children: Richard, Margaret, Paulina Ann, and Eliza Jane. In 1835 Clara's entire family was sold at auction, splitting them up across the south. Clara would spend the rest of her life looking for her family.

She gained her freedom in her 50s and eventually moved to Colorado during the gold rush. She started a successful laundry business in Central City and began investing in real estate and mines.

Clara was a deeply generous woman, always giving to those in need including taking the sick into her home. While she was searching for her family, "Aunt Clara" would use her wealth to help former slaves start new lives and livelihoods in Colorado.

At the age of 82 Clara was reunited with her youngest daughter, and they spent the last three years of Clara’s life together. She is buried at Riverside Cemetery, just five minutes away from where our affordable housing community will be built in her name.