

Empty office tower to become affordable housing complex, shelter in Calgary downtown core

- Stephanie Thomas
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Work is underway converting a vacant Seventh Avenue Calgary office tower into 82 units of affordable and specialized housing.

The project, with funding from both Alberta and the federal government, is being undertaken by the City of Calgary in collaboration with The HomeSpace Society, a non-profit housing provider, will see the conversion of a 10 floor tower by building 82 units on the first six floors.

Two other floors will be reserved for shelters and transitional housing with another floor for administrative office use and possibly child care.

"If you imagine what's going to happen in this space its going to be a place where a family lives so it's absolutely possible to do a conversion like this," said Calgary Mayor Jyoti Gondek.

The \$30 million project is part of Stronger Foundations, the province's 10 year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing.

"Alberta's government is proud to support this innovative project to help people who may need to stabilize in a shelter and then access transitional housing before moving into an affordable housing unit – all in one location," said Josephine Pon, Alberta Minister for Seniors and Housing.

"This is an example of how smart partnerships and building on community expertise will help us meet the diverse housing needs of Albertans."

The federal government kicked in \$16.6 million under a Rapid Housing Initiative to address Canada's affordable housing crisis.

"Every Canadian deserves a safe and affordable place to call home," said Ahmed Hussen, federal Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, and Minister responsible for CMHC.

"It will matter even more as we recover from COVID as we have an economic and social recovery to make sure that no one is left behind," he said.

The project is expected to create around 220 jobs.

Experts say projects like these are one solution to Calgary's estimated more than 30 per cent downtown office vacancy rate by adding more residents in the core.

"We need a wide variety of housing, including affordable housing, including rental housing, but also market-based housing. We know from decades of research, that downtown cannot be vibrant, unless there are people living there," James Stauch, director of the Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal University.

Stauch adds that socio-economic diversity in terms of residents and housing supply is crucial to improve downtown vibrancy.

"It really creates that sense of community that we need to bolster in our downtown so it is truly a place where people wish to live and make a home as well as a place to work and have some entertainment," said Mayor Gondok.

Residents are expected to move in by the end of the year.



The building is located at 706 7th Avenue Southwest facing northwest, and is on the Calgary Transit LRT line