



The Focus in Austin Is Green

In Austin, Texas, Foundation Communities is developing a 150-unit low-income housing tax credit project that will have many green features, and is retrofitting its existing apartment properties to make them more energy efficient.

The new LIHTC project, M Station, will be a quarter-mile from the Martin Luther King Station on the new commuter rail line that opened last spring, and is located in a city-designated transit-oriented district.

"We're a nonprofit affordable housing provider based here in Austin," says Sunshine Mathon, Design + Development Director with Foundation Communities. "The majority of our properties are here in Austin but, we do have three properties in the Dallas-Fort Worth area as well. All told, we own and operate in the ballpark of 2,200, soon about 2,500, rental apartments."

M Station, located in the central east section of Austin, will be the 16th property (the 5th LIHTC-funded project) developed by the Foundation Communities. It will consist of two, three-story buildings containing 12 apartments each connected by walkways to two, four-story buildings. Site work has begun and an opening is expected this summer. Apartments will be one-bedroom (32 units), two-bedroom (60), and three-bedroom (58), ranging from 712 to 1,200 square feet. All but 10 units will be rented to households at or below 60% of the area median income (AMI), with 10% of the units affordable to tenants at 30% of AMI.

The site was once used by a concrete manufacturing plant.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch is providing construction and permanent financing, and is also the equity investor, purchasing the federal housing and solar tax credits. Other funding sources include multiple grants plus local general obligation bond proceeds used to fund the acquisition of the site.

New Construction Project

"It's our first new construction project in about a decade," says Mathon. "The majority of our projects are rehabs. One of the bylines of our organization is 'creating housing where families succeed.' So we don't simply just provide affordable housing. We typically embed numerous services in each of our multifamily properties. The most common manifestation is a learning center which provides free after-school programs, free summer

programs for children in the property and the surrounding neighborhood. It also provides adult education classes – anything from ESL to financial literacy to home buying classes."



Sunshine Mathon

Green Features

M Station will meet the standards of Enterprise Green Communities, LEED Platinum, and the Austin Energy Green Building Program.

Green elements will include solar electric panels to generate electricity for the development's child care building; solar hot water panels to supply 60% of the residents' hot water needs; Energy Star-rated appliances and light fixtures (compact fluorescent lights, of the pin type that can't be replaced with ordinary light bulbs); variable refrigerant flow, super high-efficiency HVAC systems that each serve an entire building; hybrid spray insulation in the exterior walls; extremely low-flow water fixtures; native plants; and high-efficiency landscape irrigation equipment.

"The modeling we've done has [electric, gas, water] utility costs at M Station being roughly 50% of what they would be at a standard new construction code-built property."

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In addition to housing, Foundation Communities will also provide or arrange services for residents, such as after-school programs for children and financial literacy classes. M Station will have an on-site child care center operated by a long-established local nonprofit.

Retrofit Jobs

Besides new construction, Foundation Communities has retrofitted a number of its existing affordable multi-family rental properties to reduce energy and water costs and to make them healthier for residents.

Common steps have included better insulation, replacing old air conditioning equipment, installing solar screens, putting in Energy Star-rated appliances, and replacing all water fixtures with low-flow models.

In addition, Foundation Communities in retrofits tries to take out as much existing carpeting as possible and to replace this with ceramic tiles, to improve air quality for residents, reduce respiratory problems, and cut maintenance costs. **TCA**