



ON DISPLAY: A model 400-square-foot house is temporarily located in the parking lot of Elevate Branson's campus to promote Elevate Community.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY ELEVATE BRANSON

Branson nonprofit goes tiny with housing project



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Posted online August 3, 2020 | 3:48 pm

Branson nonprofit is developing a tiny homes community just north of its campus with a fall 2021 debut targeted.

The development, dubbed Elevate Community, is the project of Elevate Branson, a 12-year-old nonprofit focused on combatting poverty in the Branson area.

The village development will occupy 5 acres just north of the nonprofit's 310 Gretna Road campus in Branson. Spokesperson Ann McDowell said the development is scheduled to be complete in two phases of 24 homes each. Phase I is expected to open next year, followed by Phase II in 2022.



"We're hoping to move in our first resident in October of 2021," said Elevate Branson co-founder Bryan Stallings.

While the Herschend Family Foundation donated the land, Stallings said the organization is seeking grant opportunities to pay for clearing and infrastructure work.

“We won’t know exactly until we go through the engineering process, but we’re probably looking at \$2 million in infrastructure costs for the whole five acres,” he said.

Feels like home

Some infrastructure expenses will be covered via \$35,000 sponsorships for each house, Stallings said. Village Home Builders is manufacturing the 400-square-foot houses. The Neosho-based company also makes houses for Springfield’s Eden Village tiny homes community.

“We’re hoping for local businesses, organizations, church groups or churches, and individuals,” he said of the sponsorship model. “The cool thing about it is since we’re in such a beginning stage, when they sponsor a house, they can pick the colors of the house, cabinet colors, flooring colors.”

If all 48 homes were sponsored, it would equate to nearly \$1.7 million. No sponsors were secured as of press time, but Stallings said a model house is situated in the Elevate Branson parking lot for the next couple of months to promote the development plan. The house is on loan from Eden Village II, which is in development at 3155 W. Brower St. in Springfield.

All Elevate Community houses are for individuals or couples, Stallings said. They are fully furnished one-bedroom, one-bath homes with kitchen and living room spaces and including washers and dryers. Rent is set at \$400 a month with utilities included, and occupants must sign a one-year lease.

The target audience isn’t chronically homeless, he said, but those who are on a fixed income living at or below the poverty line – some of whom live in extended stay motels.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, the 2020 federal poverty level is \$12,760 for a single individual, or \$17,240 for a two-person household.

“We want to offer them an opportunity for fair housing so that they’re not living in substandard housing and they can get stabilized,” Stallings said. “Then, possibly at some point, they transition out of the tiny houses and into something larger.”

The city has been working for a couple of years to curb the number of motels used as long-term residences. Joel Hornickel, Branson’s director of planning and development, said there are now 27 extended stay motels in the city, down from 38 in 2018, when enforcement of annual fire, health and building code inspections ramped up.

On a mission

Stallings first visited with city officials about an affordable housing development a year ago. He received support for the tiny homes concept in August 2019, but it took a while to determine how best to fund it. He said a Community Development Block Grant became too convoluted of a process, leading to a temporary pause until this year.



Joel Hornickel: Rezoning is necessary before building can begin.

Hornickel said he’s helped guide Stallings through the project process. Prior to building, rezoning the land will be necessary, he said.

It's currently zoned for community commercial, Stallings said, and for the tiny homes, it'll need to change to high-density residential.

The rezoning request is scheduled to go before the city planning commission Aug. 4. If recommended by the commission, the request moves to the Board of Aldermen for a vote. Hornickel said a final decision by the board could be made as early as Sept. 8.

Stallings said board approval would lead to the start of engineering work, with the goal of moving dirt by April 2021.

Hornickel said the project's location near Highway 76 makes sense to aid its residents who could feasibly walk to work.

"Obviously, we understand with the tourist industry, we need housing located close to service jobs," he said.

Nate Schlueter, chief visionary officer at Eden Village in Springfield, said he's also consulted with Stallings on the project. That led to the temporary model house loan – one of 24 homes that will be in Eden Village II. The initial Eden Village development, a 31-home community for the homeless at 2801 E. Division St., opened in August 2018.

Houses for the second Eden Village are being manufactured now with plans to move in the first residents by November, he said. All but two of the houses are sponsored at \$35,000 each. Schlueter said Eden Village's parent company, The Gathering Tree, is around \$170,000 shy of its \$1.9 million fundraising goal for Eden Village II.

"We have 150 people on the waiting list," he said. "We have about three applicants apply every week."

The Gathering Tree's vision in Springfield is to have four or five tiny home communities established in the next five to seven years, Schlueter said. A third Eden Village is on the horizon at an undisclosed location in northwest Springfield.

"We're working on site plans and will probably start construction in the beginning of 2022," he said.

In Branson, Stallings is ready to kick off the fundraising portion for Elevate Community. Aside from the housing, the developers will seek micro business funding opportunities for an auto service shop and art studio on-site. The businesses would offer employment opportunities for residents and could attract locals and tourists.

"We want to empower people," he said. "We don't want them being an isolated community. We want it to be inclusive for the entire Branson area."