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EDITORIAL

Mixed-income downtown Milwaukee apartment tower needs approval

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The Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee could break ground next year on a 32-story building with 350 mixed-income apartments. Korb + Associates Architects

For the past couple of years, Milwaukee's downtown has been in the midst of a major renaissance that has brought many projects including Northwestern Mutual's corporate headquarters and Fiserv Forum, along with several luxury apartment buildings.

But as many business and community leaders have pointed out, the one element that has been missing is affordable housing where people who work at some of these projects can live. That could finally change with the recent proposal from the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee of a \$150 million tower with 350 apartments.

The project would be built at Milwaukee and Knapp streets on the housing authority's Convent Hill property. It would be a mixed-income building with market-rate apartments, but a significant number of its units would be reserved for people making less than the area's average income, the main mission of the public housing authority.

It is the largest affordable apartment development proposed in downtown Milwaukee since the recession.

Housing affordability has been a tough challenge in downtown Milwaukee. It affects all of downtown's businesses that can't offer more than \$50,000 for every job, but still need to find employees. Milwaukee Mayor [Tom Barrett](#) made affordable housing a policy priority in his 2018 State of the City Speech. Aldermen in 2017 tried, unsuccessfully, to mandate affordable units in all downtown-area projects.

The housing authority is actively pursuing the Opportunity Zone program to raise private investment to finance the project, along with other public and private sector options.

There already has been some concerns expressed about a public agency taking on this project with public funding. But since private developers are struggling to get a project to work financially with affordable housing, it makes sense that the housing authority is stepping and carrying out its mission.