

Affordable Housing and Access to Healthcare Comes to Southwest Wisconsin

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Gov. Tony Evers, WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes announce grant for Prairie du Chien, visit expanded dental clinic in Dodgeville

PRAIRIE DU CHIEN — Gov. Tony Evers today, together with Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes, visited Prairie du Chien to announce a \$250,000 state grant to help transform a blighted shopping mall into a vibrant commercial development and 96 affordable, family apartments.



“Quality, affordable family housing is a necessity for building thriving communities, and this project is a great example of how providing access to quality, affordable housing can address local workforce challenges,” said Gov. Evers. “As folks look for job and career opportunities in new communities, access to housing ensures they can live closer to where they work. Not only will this project meet several of the most pressing needs of the Prairie du Chien community, but it will create a new commercial center for both new and longtime residents to enjoy.”

The \$250,000 [Idle Sites Redevelopment grant](#) from WEDC is being used to help the city

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demolish the former Blackhawk Junction Mall at 700 and 708 E. Blackhawk Ave., as well as begin needed environmental remediation. The mall, which was originally built in 1962, was for many years a dynamic part of the Prairie du Chien community, housing everything from grocery stores and a movie theater to a dry cleaners and a furniture store. The mall eventually fell into disrepair and much of the 9-acre site was damaged in a fire in April 2014. Today, a handful of businesses operate in the site's remaining strip mall.

"This new development will allow the local businesses located here to move into modern quarters with the potential to grow," said WEDC Secretary and CEO Hughes. "Businesses such as Mississippi Meats, which I visited this holiday season, can expand in the new space and new businesses will be attracted to Prairie du Chien to serve the community members that will be living in this new housing."

According to Carl Colsch, owner of Mississippi Meats, the business will be moving into a new storefront that is more than three times the size of their current market, with plans to add more grocery items and even a hot deli.

"We are trying to keep the front-end smaller so it still the neighborhood market feel," said Colsch. "But we need a lot more behind-the-scenes space."

Colsch also remarked that the on-site apartments are going to be a big help as they offer the business new, nearby customers and potential employees.

Prairie du Chien Mayor Dave Hemmer is proud of the number of businesses moving into the city, with at least eight receiving [Main Street Bounceback grants](#) from WEDC that provide \$10,000 to businesses and nonprofits that move into a previously vacant commercial space.

"They're starting to bring a little bit of life back downtown," said Hemmer. "Right now, we have just about all our storefronts either filled or talking about something going on."

According to Carol Roth, executive director of Driftless Development Inc., the economic development organization serving Crawford County, quality, affordable workforce housing is one of the biggest concerns businesses bring up to her organization.

"There really isn't very much housing available," said Roth. "That is really one of the biggest challenges for anyone trying to start or grow their businesses. We have hospitals, we have school districts, large businesses, small businesses, and the service industry, all needing employees. It is difficult to grow if there is no place for the workforce to live."

That's why, according to Prairie du Chien Mayor Dave Hemmer, this development with its 96 apartments is so important for Prairie du Chien.

"There are jobs in Prairie du Chien," Hemmer said. "No doubt about that. Now we're going to have places for people to live."

The Idle Sites Redevelopment Grant Program offers grants of up to \$500,000 to Wisconsin

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communities for implementation of redevelopment plans for large industrial sites that have been idle, abandoned or underutilized for a period of at least five years or that may be perceived as eyesores that can lead to decreased property tax revenue for a community. In fiscal year 2021, which ended on June 30, WEDC awarded six Idle Sites Redevelopment Grants worth more than \$1.6 million.

After visiting Prairie du Chien, Gov. Evers and WEDC Secretary and CEO Hughes headed to Dodgeville to check on progress at the Access Community Health Centers-Dodgeville Dental Clinic. The clinic is expanding with help from a \$250,000 [Community Development Investment Grant](#) from WEDC. The expansion will allow the clinic to serve an additional 1,500 to 2,000 patients each year, many of them low-income individuals.

“Every Wisconsinite should have access to quality, affordable healthcare, and that has to include dental care. But far too families across our state don’t have access to these necessary services,” said Gov. Evers. “This dental clinic is already providing critically important care to those in the Dodgeville community who may have no other way of getting it, and this expansion will ensure they can keep up their good work and serve more people.”

The dental clinic, which is a Federally Qualified Health Center, now occupies the first floor of the building at 103 E. Fountain St. The project will allow it to move into the second floor, doubling its current 4,000 square feet, and provide an additional four dental operatories, bringing its total to 12 operatories.

The clinic is part of Madison-based Access Community Health Centers. Its CEO, Dr. Ken Loving, said the expansion is needed to broaden the clinic’s impact and provide much-needed dental care to the community.

“We have been honored to partner with individuals and organizations to bring quality, compassionate dental care to the people we serve,” said Loving. “This expansion is critical in our efforts to serve more people and improve the health and improve the lives of people throughout southwest Wisconsin.”

WEDC’s Community Development Investment (CDI) Grant Program supports community development and redevelopment efforts, primarily in downtown areas. The matching grants are awarded based on the ability of applicants to demonstrate the economic impact of the proposed project, including public and private partnership development, financial need, and use of sustainable downtown development practices. In fiscal year 2021, which ended June 30, WEDC awarded 41 CDI grants totaling more than \$8.5 million.

“One of the reasons for the grant program is to improve not only the economy of communities, but their quality of life—and access to good dental health care is a critical part of that,” said WEDC Secretary and CEO Hughes. “In addition, the Dodgeville expansion is expected to support six more full-time, family-supporting jobs.”