

Mariposa

Denver, Colorado

PROJECT DATA

LOCATION

1295 WEST TENTH AVENUE
DENVER, COLORADO

PROJECT STATUS

OPENING IN PHASES BEGINNING
IN 2013; COMPLETION PLANNED
BY 2018

PROJECT TYPE

MIXED-INCOME REDEVELOPMENT

PROJECT SIZE

457 UNITS (300 AFFORDABLE
AND 147 MARKET RATE);
800-PLUS TOTAL UNITS PLANNED
AT COMPLETION

SITE SIZE

17.5 ACRES (7 HA)

PROJECT COST

\$150 MILLION (ESTIMATED)

DEVELOPER

DENVER HOUSING AUTHORITY

DESIGN TEAM

MITHUN, ENVIROHEALTH
CONSULTING, SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP,
SHEARS ADKINS ROCKMORE

FINANCING

DENVER HOUSING AUTHORITY,
FEDERAL AND STATE FUNDS,
ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY
PARTNERS, CITIBANK

MENTAL HEALTH FEATURES

YOUTH CULINARY AND JOB
TRAINING PROGRAMS, ART-
FOCUSED COMMUNITY DESIGN

PHYSICAL HEALTH FEATURES

HEALTHY AND AFFORDABLE
CAFÉ AND FARMERS MARKET,
COMMUNITY GARDENING, ACCESS
TO BIKE SHARING AND LIGHT-
RAIL TRANSIT, ACTIVE STAIRCASE,
HEALTH CARE SHUTTLE BUS

MARIPOSA, a mixed-income redevelopment project, is transforming a once-distressed public housing complex into a neighborhood that prioritizes affordability, active transportation, cultural diversity, and healthy living.

Developed by the Denver Housing Authority (DHA), Mariposa is planned to include 800 affordable and market-rate residential units at completion; 457 units had been built as of early 2017. Health-focused amenities include community gardens, nutrition and cooking classes, and an active staircase.



Mariposa features community gardens that increase access to fresh produce for residents. *(Denver Housing Authority)*

Development Context

The Mariposa site was once the South Lincoln Park Homes public housing complex. In 2009, DHA began the process of redeveloping the half-century-old complex—which was experiencing concentrated poverty and above-average levels of crime—into a new development focused on community health.

During planning, the Mariposa Healthy Living Initiative, led by DHA and multidisciplinary design firm Mithun, was created to comprehensively address community health throughout redevelopment.

Through the initiative, community engagement efforts revealed that existing residents wanted to live in a safe, walkable, mixed-use community with convenient access to healthy food and community services. Lynne Picard, DHA director of workforce development and community initiatives, says these resident priorities guided redevelopment.

“It takes input from all levels of the community to figure out what it takes to create a healthy community—not just physical health, but economic health, transportation health,” she says. “You need all of them to create a truly healthy community.”

Health-Focused Features

Features to promote physical, mental, and community health at Mariposa include the following:

- * **An active staircase.** Mariposa has an “active staircase,” funded by the Colorado Health Foundation, that is wider than standard stairs and includes buttons in the railings that trigger sounds and lights to make taking the stairs attractive to children.
- * **Community gardens and access to fresh food.** Community gardens and a greenhouse provide residents with the opportunity to engage in physical activity and social interaction while growing fresh produce for consumption in an area of Denver once considered a food desert. A weekly farmers market is run by the Denver Botanic Gardens.
- * **Nutrition and cooking education and training.** The on-site Osage Café offers cooking classes and affordable, healthy meals made by area youths training for jobs in the culinary arts.
- * **Health-focused programs.** Mariposa’s healthy living coordinator organizes walking groups, health education classes, and job training services.

- * **Active transportation.** A bike-sharing station connects residents to destinations throughout Denver via the B-Cycle system. Mariposa is within walking distance of the Tenth and Osage light-rail station, providing residents without cars with a healthy and affordable way to get around.
- * **A health care shuttle bus.** Residents have access to free transportation to the Denver Health Medical Plaza.
- * **Creative placemaking.** Murals and public art were commissioned in plazas and on buildings to support neighborhood safety and reflect cultural diversity in the public realm.

Development Lessons

As part of the Mariposa Healthy Living Initiative, DHA performs yearly surveys of Mariposa residents to assess changes in health indicators. These surveys have already shown positive results.

By 2012, after the first phases of redevelopment, 38 percent of residents said their health had improved, and smoking rates had dropped 6 percent. The percentage of residents with access to open space and nature within a half mile (0.8 km) of their homes increased from 26 to 32 percent and the crime rate per 1,000 people decreased from 248 to 157.

Spurred by the redevelopment, Mariposa is now surrounded by a number of businesses and neighborhood institutions, including a 24-hour grocery store, a full-service pharmacy, and eight community and conventional banks.

Although waiting lists for housing at Mariposa are significant, 45 percent of the South Lincoln Park Homes residents have returned, which compares favorably with the national rate of 10 percent for similar public housing redevelopment projects.

Much of Mariposa’s success has relied on strong partnerships, including with the Colorado Health Foundation.

“Through dedicated community engagement and tailoring design elements with educational programming to reflect community needs, Mariposa has made healthy living a norm,” says Khanh Nguyen, portfolio director at the Colorado Health Foundation. “Given their thoughtful and successful approach, they have become a leader in healthy and creative design. We are proud to have partnered with them early in the process and delighted to see that community thrive.”