

Project Thrive: Neoma

Award Category: Housing Innovation

Address: 706 7 Ave SW, Calgary, AB T2P 1A1

Owner: HomeSpace

Project Designer: Jonny Hehr

Completion: September 2022

Neoma is an innovative office-to-affordable-housing project in the heart of Downtown Calgary. A revolutionary space in Calgary's residential market, Neoma provides safe, affordable homes for nearly 200 Calgarians in need. Designed for HomeSpace, Neoma includes 82 affordable housing units (37% below-market rents), 10 transitional shelter units, emergency family shelter and wrap-around programming.

Inn From the Cold (IFTC) relocated operations to this multi-family hub to serve a greater community and reinvigorate Calgary's Downtown. Working closely with our clients, HomeSpace and their tenants at IFTC, we transformed this former office into a place that truly feels like home for Calgarians from all walks of life.

Accessibility

Affordable housing is critical in creating an accessible urban community; integrally tied to the financial implications of housing/rental markets. Neoma is close to public transit and pedestrian-friendly, offering an idyllic urban-living context for accessible and transitional housing models reintroducing individuals into housing with integrated programming and services.

Upper floors feature studio to 3-bedroom units with adaptable floorplans. Living spaces are accessible by elevator and connected to amenities on the lower levels. Neoma's interior maintains spatial efficiency while prioritizing wheelchair access. Units feature large windows for natural daylight and spacious living areas to accommodate families. Two floors of temporary shelter suites for IFTC connect with the dining hall, family, kids' and teens' rooms. Universal change rooms and washrooms are available to all staff and visitors, along with a guest telephone room.

Safer-Spaces for Low-Income Calgarians

We designed a purpose-built environment that supports and reinforces best practices in trauma-informed care for families. Neoma welcomes visitors and tenants, centering warmth and hominess from the exterior and throughout. IFTC and HomeSpace's programming supports families in a dignified and culturally-sensitive environment with access to emergency shelter, integrated support services and affordable housing under one roof. This holistic approach ensures families achieve and maintain housing stability, breaking the cycle of homelessness in our city.

Artistic design elements and programming promote belonging and representation for Neoma's diverse residents. A magnificent 15,000-square-foot exterior mural – the largest in Alberta – enriches the West

wall. Internally, vibrant murals and artwork from 65 local artists adorn Neoma's walls with creativity. Artists gathered supplies for Neoma's art room, where residents can take classes and work on personal art projects. Neoma's tenants will bring new life and community into Calgary's formerly buttoned-up Downtown Commercial district.

Housing Innovation & Community Building

This adaptive and community-driven strategy toward accessible housing is evident from the exterior of the building. Saturated with rich materiality and colours, Neoma contrasts the previous dark, brutalist façade. Bright reveals on the exterior windowsills contribute to wayfinding and self-identification for tenants and guests alike, making it possible for long-term tenants to point out their window – a place to call their own, not just a room to occupy for a time. Exterior lighting features provide clear identification and wayfinding, ensuring safe entry and exit zones with “eyes-on-the-street” from the active, transparent podium. Neoma turned a vacant building into much-needed housing and a community hub for the Downtown Core.