CITY OF HELENA

CALL FOR CONCEPTS

REQUEST FOR INFORMAL PROPOSALS (RFIP)

AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUNITY SHOWCASE

Housing Concepts, Demonstration Homes, and Implementation Partnerships for Helena, Montana

RFIP No.	CD-RFIP-26-0002
Issue Date	October 26, 2026
Questions Due	November 13, 2026, 12:00PM, Mountain Time
Proposal Deadline	November 20, 2026, 12:00PM, Mountain Time
City Contact	Chris Brink, Director
Department	Community Development Department

An open invitation to housing innovators

The City invites any individual, entity, or collaborative team to propose an affordable housing concept for consideration in the Helena Affordable Housing Showcase. Participation may range from a concept exhibit to a proposed demonstration home or implementation partnership.

Help show how thoughtful design, practical construction, and creative partnerships can make housing more attainable in Helena.

CITY OF HELENA

CALL FOR CONCEPTS

REQUEST FOR INFORMAL PROPOSALS (RFIP)

AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUNITY SHOWCASE

1. INVITATION

The City of Helena is looking for new ideas, creative partnerships, and practical solutions to help make housing more attainable in our community. We invite individuals, businesses, developers, nonprofits, educational institutions, organizations, students, designers, builders, lenders, and community groups to share ideas that could help address Helena's housing needs.

Ideas might include innovative housing designs or construction methods, creative financing or ownership models, new uses for underutilized land or buildings, rehabilitation or preservation strategies, infrastructure solutions, ways to simplify development processes, public-private partnerships, workforce or starter housing concepts, or entirely new approaches we have not yet considered.

Concepts do not need to be large or fully developed. We welcome everything from small pilot projects to ideas that could eventually be replicated or scaled throughout Helena. Our goal is simple: bring good ideas to the table, connect the right partners, and explore what we can accomplish together. If you have an idea that could help make housing more attainable in Helena, we want to hear it.

The City may invite selected concepts into public exhibits, educational programming, further feasibility work, or planning for physical demonstration homes. A submission should identify the participation level sought. Selection for an exhibit does not commit the City or proposer to construction.

2. CLOSING DATE, QUESTIONS, AND SUBMITTAL

CLOSING DATE AND TIME: Proposals must be received no later than 12:00PM Mountain Time, November 20, 2026. Late proposals will not be accepted.

QUESTIONS: Written questions must be received by November 13, 2026/12:00PM, Mountain Time. Questions shall be directed only to the City Contact identified below. When a response modifies or clarifies the RFIP, the City will issue a written addendum and post it with the solicitation materials.

CITY CONTACT: Christopher Brink, Community Development Director (or designated RFIP project manager), City of Helena Community Development Department, 316 North Park Avenue, Helena, MT 59623; 406-447-8490; citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov.

SUBMITTAL METHOD: All submittals must be electronic. Each design proposal must be submitted as a separate, clearly labeled PDF package. The City has established a file transfer folder for large plan or rendering files. To request a link to the file transfer folder, please email the City Contact identified above.

A link to a submittal specific folder will be emailed to you. Please upload all the documents listed in Section 11 of this RFIP to that folder.

3. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Helena continues to experience housing affordability and availability pressures across household types and income levels. The City's housing work and the adopted Helena Forward Land Use Plan emphasize increasing housing opportunities, supporting infill and thoughtful growth, improving predictability in the development process, and responding to the need for a broader range of housing choices.

The City of Helena is working on an Affordable Housing Showcase project which is envisioned as a public learning and demonstration project that brings housing ideas into view and connects potential partners. It will help residents and decision makers understand the relationship between design, development costs, financing, household costs, and the ability to build more housing. No site or construction funding is committed through this call.

4. PROJECT GOALS

- Demonstrate credible ways to lower total housing costs and expand housing choices.
- Make concepts understandable through plans, cost information, displays, and public engagement.
- Connect designers, builders, housing organizations, manufacturers, residents, and financial partners.
- Identify approaches that can be adapted and repeated in Helena, other Montana communities, and beyond.

5. HOUSING CONCEPTS INVITED

This showcase will focus on concepts for ADUs; cottages and starter homes; duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and other small multifamily forms; modular, panelized, manufactured, or other alternative construction; accessible or multigenerational housing; and rehabilitation, conversion, shared equity, or other housing approaches with a clear demonstration value. The call does not prescribe one architectural style or construction system.

A financing, ownership, or delivery concept should include a representative housing form or illustrative application. Applicants may submit more than one concept in separate packages. Existing and previously built designs are welcome when the applicant controls the necessary rights and explains their suitability for Helena.

6. HELENA CONDITIONS AND REGULATORY FEASIBILITY

Explain how the concept could respond to Helena's winters, snow, frost, wind, seismic conditions, terrain, utility access, and construction market. Identify likely building classifications, foundation needs, site constraints, and any unusual approval or technical questions. Detailed engineering is not required with a concept submission.

Any construction must follow the applicable regulatory pathway, including local and state requirements and relevant factory-built housing approvals. Identify unresolved code issues and proposed methods of addressing them. Showcase selection does not establish code compliance or replace permit review.

7. CORE CONCEPT REQUIREMENTS

- Describe the housing need, intended households, and the specific mechanism that improves affordability.

- For housing proposals, provide enough visual and written information to understand the housing form and proposed use.
- Present preliminary cost assumptions and distinguish supported estimates from targets or unknowns.
- Identify development status, key constraints, needed partners, and the participation level requested.
- Demonstrate permission to submit and publicly display the included material.

8. DESIRED FEATURES ENCOURAGED

The City encourages efficient layouts; durable, repairable materials; low utility and maintenance costs; accessible entries and adaptable interiors; climate-responsive design; efficient land use; practical construction methods; and approaches that support lasting affordability. Innovation is welcome when its benefits and implementation challenges are explained.

9. RELATIONSHIP TO THE HOUSING PLAN LIBRARY

The Showcase complements the City's Ready-to-Issue Residential Model Building Plan Library. A showcase concept may later be proposed for that program through its separate requirements and agreement. Showcase participation does not confer model-plan approval, impose the library's licensing fees, or require a proposer to release construction documents for public reuse.

10. WHO MAY PARTICIPATE

Individuals, businesses, builders, developers, architects, engineers, manufacturers, nonprofits, housing providers, tribal entities, public agencies, educational institutions, students, community groups, and joint teams may submit. Local and out-of-area participants are welcome. No professional license is required solely to propose a concept; professional design and construction work must be performed by appropriately qualified persons when required.

Identify a responsible contact and disclose partner roles. A student may identify an adult representative for any later agreement. Applicants without a complete team may describe the assistance or partners they seek.

11. SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

Submit a concise PDF organized as follows. Suggested length: up to 12 narrative pages plus drawings, the cost worksheet, and certifications. Concept-level sketches are acceptable; full permit drawings, a financial commitment, and proof of site control are not required.

A. Contact and team: Applicant name, entity type, representative, contact information, partners, and brief relevant experience. Identify missing team roles without treating them as a barrier to entry.

B. Concept summary: Project name, housing type, development stage, number of homes, approximate gross area, bedrooms/bathrooms, intended tenure, households served, and principal affordability strategy.

C. Visual information: Floor plan or layout diagram, exterior image or sketch, and a conceptual site arrangement. Include dimensions and scale where known. A housing delivery concept may use representative plans and a process diagram.

D. Affordability: Complete Appendix B or provide equivalent information. State target sale price or rent, income range or households served, household size assumptions, expected monthly costs, subsidy needs, and any proposed affordability period or mechanism. Identify the source and date of any income benchmark.

E. Delivery and feasibility: Where applicable, include timeline for implementation, construction method, climate response, likely regulatory pathway, site/infrastructure needs, supply chain, schedule, unresolved issues, and major cost risks.

F. Showcase participation: Request concept display, potential physical demonstration, implementation partnership, or a combination. Describe proposed exhibit materials, tours or presentations, and contributions available. Identify funding, land, infrastructure, or partner support requested.

G. Rights and certification: Identify design ownership and third-party permissions; list exceptions to the proposed terms; acknowledge addenda; and include Appendix A certification.

Showcase readiness will be assessed separately from the merit of the underlying concept. An early-stage idea may be suitable for an exhibit even when it is not ready for construction.

12. SELECTION PROCESS

City staff will check submissions for completeness and relevance. A City designated panel may include housing, design, building, development, finance, and community perspectives. Reviewers will disclose conflicts and refrain from evaluating proposals where a conflict exists.

The panel may request clarification or a presentation and recommend concepts for exhibit inclusion, further feasibility review, or physical demonstration planning. The City may select multiple concepts, fewer than anticipated, or none. A balanced showcase may consider housing form, cost strategy, development stage, and educational value in addition to scores.

13. SELECTION CRITERIA – 100 POINTS

The following proposed scoring framework will guide concept review. The City will consider the information reasonably available at the proposal's stated development stage. Unsubstantiated affordability claims will receive less weight than transparent assumptions and evidence.

Criterion	Points	What the City Will Evaluate
Affordability and household benefit	30	Total costs, target households, operating expenses, subsidy assumptions, and durability of affordability.
Feasibility and constructability	20	Practical delivery, credible costs, regulatory pathway, and a clear account of unresolved issues.
Replicability and housing impact	15	Potential for implementation, repeat use, varied sites, efficient land use, and meaningful housing choice.
Public demonstration value	15	Clear educational content and lessons useful to residents, builders, and policymakers.
Accessibility and livability	10	Usability for varied ages, abilities, and household needs.
Energy, Durability & Climate Resilience	10	Cold-weather suitability, maintenance, resource efficiency, and long-term costs.

14. SELECTED CONCEPTS

Before public display, selected participants will confirm exhibit content, attribution, cost disclosures, and display permission. Concepts considered for construction will proceed through a separate feasibility and agreement stage addressing site fit, budgets, funding, schedule, design responsibilities, and required approvals. No participant is required to begin construction or incur additional design expense without agreeing to the next-stage scope.

15. PERMITTING AND TECHNICAL REVIEW

Physical installation, public tours, occupancy, utility connections, and future use require the applicable approvals. The responsible parties will resolve site conditions, foundations, access, fire safety, accessibility, utilities, and other requirements before the relevant activity begins. No fee waiver or expedited approval is promised by this call.

16. COMPENSATION AND PUBLIC REUSE

Identify all requested compensation, grants, land contributions, infrastructure assistance, or in-kind support. No award, stipend, reimbursement, subsidy, or funding allocation is committed by this call. Participants are responsible for submission expenses. Any subsequent City expenditure or commitment requires a separately authorized written agreement and any applicable selection or procurement process.

Applicants may propose sponsorships, donated services or materials, financing partners, and other contributions. Separate one-time demonstration support from costs expected on a repeat project. Any future construction license, design reuse fee, or plan-library participation will be negotiated separately; submitting a concept does not authorize construction from it.

17. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND RECOGNITION

Selected concepts may be featured in exhibits, digital materials, presentations, tours, or discussions with attribution. The City may offer public feedback or community recognition. Public display materials should clearly label conceptual, estimated, and completed elements.

18. ESTIMATED SCHEDULE

The City reserves the right to alter the schedule.

Milestone	Recommended Timing
RFIP released	Week 0
Deadline for written questions	Week 3
Proposal submission deadline	Week 4
Selection committee review / finalist clarification	Weeks 5–6
Notice of selected concepts	Week 7-8
Selected Designer agreements / kickoff	Weeks 7-8
Feasibility and participation agreements	Weeks 7-8

Milestone	Recommended Timing
Showcase opening/construction	Week 9-10

19. SUBMISSION ADMINISTRATION

Applicants should review all addenda and disclose material conflicts, commercial relationships, and requested exceptions. Submissions may be withdrawn in writing before the deadline. Late submissions will not be considered unless the City formally extends the deadline for all applicants. Material changes after closing may be requested only through an equitable City process.

Direct solicitation questions to the designated City contact. The City may clarify proposals, waive minor defects, revise or cancel the call, or decline any submission, subject to applicable requirements. A selection identifies a potential showcase participant and does not award professional services, a construction contract, land, or financial assistance.

Submitted materials may be publicly disclosed as required by law. Identify any claimed confidential material and the basis for that claim; avoid submitting unnecessary sensitive information. A confidentiality label alone does not assure nondisclosure.

20. PARTICIPATION TERMS

- Creators retain their design ownership. Applicants must hold permission for all submitted images, plans, trademarks, and other third-party content.
- Submission permits City review and legally required records retention. Public showcase use will be governed by written, nonexclusive permission identifying the materials, attribution, media, duration, and any limits. Construction and commercial reuse rights are excluded unless separately granted.
- A physical demonstration agreement must allocate design, permitting, site preparation, construction, utilities, insurance, public access, safety, maintenance, ownership, and removal or conversion responsibilities.
- The agreement must address completion costs, schedule, cost overruns, warranties, final occupancy or disposition, any sale or rental terms, and any affordability commitments and monitoring responsibilities.
- Participants will approve factual display information and update significant changes to cost, availability, or implementation status. The City may correct, archive, or remove misleading or unsuitable exhibit material.

21. PROGRAM LIMITATIONS

The Showcase is an educational and partnership initiative. Inclusion does not constitute a product endorsement, professional certification, guaranteed construction opportunity, or assurance of financing. A lower-cost concept is not automatically eligible for an income-restricted housing program. Any income limits, affordability restrictions, or financial assistance requirements must be established through the applicable program and project agreement.

APPENDIX A – CONCEPT SUBMITTAL CHECKLIST

☐ Contact and team information; concept and participation level identified.

☐ As applicable, narrative, drawings, and site assumptions provided.

☐ Cost and household affordability information provided, including unknowns.

☐ Delivery status, partner needs, contributions, and requested support disclosed.

☐ Ownership, display permissions, exceptions, and addenda addressed.

I am authorized to submit this concept. To the best of my knowledge, the information is accurate, estimates and assumptions are identified, and the applicant holds or can obtain the rights described in this submission. I understand that selection does not commit funding, land, permits, or construction and that subsequent participation terms require written agreement.

Applicant/entity: _____
Authorized representative/title: _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____
Addenda acknowledged: _____

APPENDIX B – COST AND AFFORDABILITY WORKSHEET

Provide estimates in current dollars with the estimate date, source, location, and level of confidence. Use "unknown" where appropriate. Provide per-home and total figures for multi-home proposals, and identify costs shared across units.

Item	Applicant response
Estimate basis	Date; preparer/source; concept, contractor estimate, or actual cost; gross area.
Base building costs	Materials, labor, factory cost if applicable; transport, crane/setup; contractor overhead and profit. Explain inclusions.
Land and site costs	Land or lease; demolition; grading; foundations; drainage; landscaping; streets, sidewalks, and shared areas.
Utilities and soft costs	Connections, service extensions, design/engineering, permits, insurance, financing, and other fees.
Contingency and total	Contingency allowance; total development cost; cost per home and per gross square foot; exclusions.
Demonstration versus repeat cost	Separate donated inputs, exhibition expenses, prototype costs, and expected repeat-production costs.
Sale price or rent	Proposed price/rent range; developer fee or margin assumptions; tenure and intended households.
Household affordability	Income/household assumptions; benchmark source/date; utilities; taxes, insurance, association or ground-lease charges; financing/down payment assumptions where relevant.
Assistance needed	Amount/type of subsidy, donated land/labor/materials, favorable financing, or other support; secured versus proposed.

Lasting affordability	Proposed restriction or ownership mechanism, duration, steward/administrator, and monitoring approach, if any.
Risks and sensitivity	Major cost risks; effect of losing donated inputs, financing changes, or cost escalation; evidence supporting claimed savings.

Explain why the concept is affordable for the households identified. Where household income is used, show estimated monthly housing costs as a share of gross monthly income and state what is included. Explain the affordability measure used; no single income threshold is established by this call.