Upper Valley MEND is excited to announce that the 26-acre property between Titus Road and Chumstick Highway has been sold to Weidner Apartment Homes. Selling the property will allow Upper Valley MEND to grow the community’s affordable homeownership portfolio so that more members of the Upper Valley’s workforce have the opportunity to purchase local homes for a price they can afford.

“For the last few years, it’s been hard for MEND to get involved with new affordable housing development, since we have needed to sell this property before extending the organization into new areas of growth. When the sale closes next month we will be able to invest in a series of new opportunities to develop and preserve affordable housing going forward,” said Executive Director Kaylin Bettinger.

The property was originally acquired by Upper Valley MEND, a local nonprofit, through a combination of donations, grants, and loans. The original concept for the development was a neighborhood of mixed income homes. That project was not successful due to cost constraints.

While the property was for sale, MEND approached other affordable housing developers to see if there was any interest in doing a project on the site.

“We know many people wish we could have sold the property to an affordable housing developer. We had originally hoped the same, and we actively talked with many affordable housing developers locally and around the state about the opportunity,” said Bettinger. “Because of the high cost and complexity to put in roads and infrastructure on the site, the property wasn’t feasible for other affordable developers.”

While plans are still being developed, Weidner has indicated that they will build a mix of long-term rentals on the property, which is consistent with the current zoning on the property. Of the alternatives to affordable housing, Upper Valley MEND feels this type of development has the best chance to improve access to housing for the local workforce.

“When we put the property on the open market, we had pretty consistent interest from private developers. Our conversations with the Weidner group spanned several years,” said Andy Lane, president of the Upper Valley MEND board of directors. “We liked that Weidner develops, owns and operates multifamily rental housing, so they are motivated to invest in communities where they build.”

Weidner also built and manages Leavenworth Haus in Leavenworth and Riverside 9 in Wenatchee.

Weidner has said they will be working with Cascade School District on plans for a trails system on Rattlesnake Hill, ensuring Rattlesnake Hill remains a public resource under public stewardship to benefit residents and visitors alike.

The Upper Valley MEND board of directors has earmarked all proceeds from this sale to be used towards future affordable housing projects, in the spirit of the donations that were made to the project years ago.

MEND is currently exploring the feasibility of different housing projects, including adding three new single-family affordable homes to Leavenworth starting in 2022. This project would be a partnership
between MEND, Borealis Builders and the City of Leavenworth. All of these groups recognize the need for workforce housing in Leavenworth, and are considering contributing funds or donating labor to build these new homes.

If this project proceeds, the focus will be on permanently affordable workforce and family housing. New homes will provide local housing opportunities for community members like teachers, healthcare workers, service workers and agricultural workers who make our community strong and can’t otherwise afford to purchase a home here.

Upper Valley MEND’s Community Land Trust:

Upper Valley MEND’s model of homeownership is called a Community Land Trust. With this model, land is held in a trust on behalf of the community. Housing is developed on the land for local people who earn a moderate income.

Leavenworth currently has 20 Community Land Trust homes. Ten homes are in Aldea Village, the neighborhood adjacent to Club West. Ten are in Alpine Heights, the neighborhood on Park Ave behind Mountain Meadows Assisted Living.

In a Community Land Trust, all homes are owned by individuals who live in the homes full time. The owner purchases the home at an affordable price. If the homeowner decides to sell the home, they must sell for an affordable price, so all subsequent homeowners have the opportunity to own an affordable home too. Since 2001, 32 families have owned, cared for, and benefitted from MEND’s Community Land Trust homes in Leavenworth.

Over the coming years, MEND intends to grow the number of Community Land Trust homes in the Upper Valley. If you are interested in getting involved with the Community Land Trust, please give us a call at (509) 548-0408.