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## Edwards River Park Approved for 270 Deed-Restricted Homes and Family Learning Centre

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On Monday, the Eagle County Board of Commissioners, by a 2-1 vote, approved a Planned Unit Development (PUD) Amendment for Edwards River Park, paving the way for 270 deed-restricted homes and a new home for the Family Learning Centre (FLC). This decision, made after nearly two years of rigorous review, marks a significant step towards addressing the pressing need for attainable housing in Eagle County while prioritising environmental stewardship.

The project, spearheaded by Aptitude Development, which secured the site in late 2022, faced unique challenges due to its location on a former industrial gravel pit, 40 feet below Highway 6. Jared Hutter of Aptitude Development expressed gratitude for the thorough evaluation by county officials, stating in a recent interview, “We are very appreciative of the county staff, Planning Commission, and Board of Commissioners for their thorough review of an amendment that allows us to bring our vision for attainable housing and a new home for Family Learning Centre to fruition.” The approved amendment aligns with the 2022 PUD approvals, with minor adjustments to accommodate the site’s complex terrain and protect its sensitive riparian areas.

The development will deliver 440 residential units, of which 270 are deed-restricted to ensure affordability for local workers, including teachers, firefighters, police officers, doctors, nurses, and county employees. These homes aim to anchor the Eagle River Valley’s workforce, fostering a stronger, more resilient community. Additionally, the project reallocates 10,000 square feet of previously approved commercial space to expand the FLC’s childcare facility, including 2,500 square feet of outdoor space, addressing a critical community need.

Whitney Young Keltner, FLC’s executive director, praised the project’s balance of housing and environmental priorities, noting, “It strikes a vital balance between preserving our beautiful wetlands and natural landscapes, while also addressing the critical need for housing in our community.” She highlighted the potential for teachers and other essential workers to benefit from proximity to affordable homes, enhancing their quality of life and the county’s social fabric.

The site’s 53.27 acres, once a barren gravel pit, will be transformed into a vibrant neighbourhood with 35 acres dedicated to open space, including protected wetlands and wildlife corridors. A conservation easement will ensure long-term preservation, with seasonal closures to safeguard elk, waterfowl, and other species. The development will also fund a new roundabout at Lake Creek Road and Highway 6, costing over £3.8 million, to improve traffic flow for the wider community. A 0.2% transfer fee on property sales will support wildlife enhancements, while a 1% real estate transfer fee will create a perpetual fund for sustainable housing.

The project incorporates robust sustainability measures, earning praise from the Climate Action Collaborative for features like green-certified buildings, solar energy, electric vehicle charging stations, and WaterSense fixtures. A state-of-the-art transit stop, extensive trail

networks, and boardwalk piers will enhance public access to the Eagle River and its preserve, while minimizing environmental impact. McDowell Engineering's October 2024 traffic memo confirmed a 10% reduction in traffic volume from the original PUD, ensuring infrastructure improvements meet community needs without overburdening roads.

Commissioners debated building height adjustments, ultimately approving heights below the 35-foot threshold above Highway 6 after Hutter withdrew requests for minor exceedances. The project also replaces underground parking with a multi-deck garage and podium parking, designed to be environmentally friendly and visually discreet. These changes, alongside architectural tweaks to blend with the local aesthetic, reflect a commitment to practical, community-focused development. Edwards River Park stands as a bold reclamation of an industrial site, blending attainable housing, environmental conservation, and community infrastructure. With groundbreaking planned for 2026, this development promises to serve as a model for sustainable growth in Eagle County, delivering homes for those who keep the valley thriving while preserving its natural beauty.