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# Social Security Administration office to join growing Hellgate Meadows west of Reserve Street

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 By [AJ MAZZOLINI of the Missoulian](#) | Posted: Wednesday, January 6, 2010 11:15 pm | [\(6\) Comments](#)

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Karen Kleinklaus brought her cat "Jumbo" all the way from St. Ignatius in a snowstorm earlier this week so her vet at Four Paws Veterinary Clinic could look at the animal. Four Paws was one of the first businesses to move to the Hellgate Meadows neighborhood seven years ago. Today, several businesses call the area home. Photo by MICHAEL GALLACHER/Missoulian

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Missoula's Social Security Administration office will relocate to Hellgate Meadows west of North Reserve Street later this year.

The Social Security office is one of the latest businesses to move across town into the Hellgate Meadows subdivision. The office, currently located in the Lewis and Clark Shopping Center on Southwest Higgins Avenue, is following the lead of a dentist and fellow Southwest Higgins business that relocated to Hellgate Meadows in January a year ago.

"It's the (location) that's going to be able to do what we want," said Dean Johnson, the district manager of Missoula's Social Security office. The building will allow the office to share space with administrative law judges now based out of the courthouse, he said.

An administrative law judge presides at hearings to resolve disputes between a government agency, in this case Social Security, and an individual.

Montana Compounding Pharmacy, a third Higgins Avenue company, this one located downtown on North Higgins, is also planning to move into Hellgate Meadows and hopes to start construction on a new building sometime this year.

Hellgate Meadows is Montana's first neighborhood with a "new urbanism" design. Plans for the neighborhood were first adopted by Missoula in February 2002. New urbanism is a planning style that promotes walkable streets containing a wide range of housing and business types, said Bob Brugh, Hellgate Meadows' founder and developer.

"It's a more pleasing neighborhood," Brugh said, "a nice wholesome place that's not a typical suburban model."

Brugh designed Hellgate Meadows to act like a contained community, including its own version of a downtown that emulates the building style prevalent in Missoula from 1890 to 1935.

"It's kind of the ultimate compliment," said Linda McCarthy, the executive director of the Missoula Downtown Association. "I think it's a beautiful design."

McCarthy said she isn't too concerned about losing businesses to Hellgate Meadows. Her comments came on the day that Macy's, downtown Missoula's anchor store, announced it would close. But McCarthy said that businesses opening and closing is the natural way of things and she isn't worried about any effects moving businesses may have.

In planning the development, Brugh said, he stayed away from cookie-cutter homes and buildings. He said subdivisions that are made up of look-alike homes can be unappealing to people, many of whom are looking for a unique home that is different than its neighbor.

"We don't all wear the same clothes every day," Brugh said. "Why should we all come out of homes with the same architectural format every day? Different is a good thing."



Luke Siminich of Simco Ventures West, a Littleton, Colo., group contracted to construct the Social Security building this spring, was excited to start work on the project. New urbanism neighborhoods are a great concept that he's interested in being a part of, he said.

"(Brugh's) community is real unique," Siminich said. "You're like a little city within a city."

Hellgate Meadows is complete with an elementary school, Mountain Line bus stop, parks, accounting and insurance offices, veterinary clinic, dental office and central mail house designed as "another reason to get people to cross paths," Brugh said.

Some of those small businesses are fulfilling a few needs of North Reserve.

One of the first businesses to move into Hellgate Meadows, Four Paws Veterinary Clinic, opened seven years ago and marked only the second veterinarian in that part of town. Before dentist Josh Green reopened his practice in Hellgate Meadows in 2009, there were no dentists in northwest Missoula.

The lack of certain services in the area was a contributing factor that led Green to move his business across town where he could be the first in the dental field near North Reserve Street, he said.

"We had a record year in 2009," Green said. "We experienced a lot of growth and have been able to tap into this side of town."

The movement of these businesses is part of an increasing trend in Missoula, Brugh said. According to a study done by Brugh's neighborhood planning company Neighborhoods by Design, the population of Missoula north of the Clark Fork River has grown by 25 percent in the last decade.

The pattern is growth to the north and west, Brugh said, stretching out past Reserve Street toward the airport.

Along with several personal businesses and residents moving in that direction, a new multipurpose event center is now being considered for the area. The optimal facility, once thought to fit the community best at the county fairgrounds on the south side of town, would hold as many as 7,000 seats and could be used for basketball tournaments and other ticket-generated events.

Two locations are now leading the way, said Rob Hunden, president of the Midwestern consulting firm Hunden Strategic Partners. Both are located in northwest Missoula.

Areas west of Reserve Street near the Missoula International Airport present the best setting for an event center, Hunden said. The facility would be highly visible there and easily reached from Interstate 90. Ability for expansion presents another key factor to its placement, he said, something that wasn't available at locations in south Missoula.

AJ Mazzolini is a junior studying print journalism at the University of Montana who is interning at the Missoulian. He can be reached at (406) 523-5251.