

**NINA MOINI:** So excited to be at this beautiful new library-- it just opened over a month ago-- and to bring you a full hour that centers the voices of community members in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Our first guest is Moorhead Mayor Shelly Carlson. She was a city council member starting in 2018, mayor since 2021. She's also currently running for the state legislature. Thank you so much for being here to help us kick the show off, Mayor Carlson.

**SHELLY CARLSON:** Thank you for being here. Thank you for coming up. And we love to showcase our city. We love it dearly.

**NINA MOINI:** Well, like I said, we have been having just a blast as a team. And we saw this beautiful library building today, and we just could not believe it. There's a walking track upstairs, tall ceilings. I mean, it's really beautiful. Tell us a little bit about how this library is part of a bigger effort to revitalize downtown and sort of a bit of a shift that seems to be occurring.

**SHELLY CARLSON:** Yeah. Our downtown was a older mall that was built in the early 1970s, and as businesses kind of left that area-- and you see it not just in Moorhead, but across the state of Minnesota and even across the country-- that the strip malls, they're just needing a revitalization. And so in 2018, as part of our downtown plan, we decided that we needed to completely redo and reimagine what our downtown could be. And that meant that the mall kind of went away.

And after Herbergers, the big kind of cornerstone of the mall-- when they left, it was really the moment that we took that leap of faith. And we have 18 acres in our downtown that we get to reimagine what it's going to be. And when you took them all away, our sugar cube is what we call our city hall, is also being renovated. And now that is going to be a place for people to go.

And with our Community Center Library, this is a cornerstone. And it's kind of our living room and the heart of our community. And as people start coming here and they're starting to see all the other revitalization that is happening, it's just going to be a place where everybody's going to be coming to in the future. So we're so excited about it.

**NINA MOINI:** I love the idea of just more spaces for people to gather. I think a lot of people are really seeking community and wanting to come out and see what's going on. I know housing, too, is a focus and a goal, and some of these more mixed use developments you were talking about, some of the buildings that we can even see out of the window here, and what's going to be developing with them. How does affordable housing, more housing fit into this plan?

**SHELLY CARLSON:** Well, every parcel that we are looking at, besides the Community Center Library, which we very affectionately Moorhead call The Loop-- it's a little play on words. You can walk The Loop, which is 1/8 of a mile, but if you're coming here, you're then in The Loop. That was our first, but then there was a development on the Eastern side that is 3 acres. That's a mixed use. And it is that housing.

We are going to be building-- I believe it was 2,100 different units in our downtown. And we are seeking developers that want to put some of that lower, more affordable housing units in our downtown. But we want to also have a mix of housing units because you don't want it all to be the same. You want a variety and options for people.

So that's what we're looking for. And that mixed use is so important, because you have businesses on the bottom. People are coming here. You talk about it being a third place. You have your home, have your work, and then that other place you want to go to. And that is what this Community Center Library or The Loop is really, truly becoming. This is where people are coming to find out what's going on in our city.

And we're going to have a plaza that's going to be built on the north side, which is going to just also have many more community events. And between City Hall, The Loop, and our plaza, it's going to be that trifecta of some amazing things happening in our downtown between the two new streets that we put in our downtown-- Minnesota Avenue and Red River Avenue. So we are making a downtown.

**NINA MOINI:** I think one of the cool dynamics that we've been tapping into as a team, as well, is the dynamic between Fargo and Moorhead, and the Fargo-Moorhead region, and the working together but trying to distinguish your own city, your own space. How do you balance that?

**SHELLY CARLSON:** We are a community here of about 250,000 people. We're the largest community outside of the metro between here and, I think, the West Coast. 250,000 people. We're definitely an urban community. And with our downtowns being so close, it's not a zero sum game.

So a rising tide is going to lift all boats. And whatever is happening in Fargo, we are cheering them on as much as they are cheering us on. But what we want to do and when we spoke to our residents, is we want to make this quintessentially Moorhead and quintessentially Minnesota. So when you cross that river, you feel the nature. You feel that community. You feel the diversity that is beautiful in the city of Moorhead.

And the unique thing in Moorhead is we're slightly larger than Fargo. So that means that we don't have flood walls along the river. So Fargo, they have to have flood walls, which is wonderful because we don't want any part of our community flooding. But we don't have that. So when you come here, we're also making sure that it will be able to draw you to nature, draw you to the river.

We have a beautiful-- I think it's 16 miles of a river walk, from North Moorhead all the way to South Moorhead. We're connecting it to Fargo so you can make a huge loop between our two communities. And it's just something that we really embrace on this side of the river. We're also the fourth fastest growing community outside of the Twin Cities. So Clay County is the fourth fastest growing county, but that growth in Clay County is happening in Moorhead.

**NINA MOINI:** We did spend some time on the Red River today, the team. We were kayaking. I made it, though. I'm here, so just reaffirming that if I can kayak on the Red River, anyone can get out there and use the river. And we talked about preserving and protecting the river, and some of the flood risks and things that you mentioned.

Of course, one thing, every community has a weather event or something that sticks with people for years and years later. The Red River flood of 1997 is that, I take it, for this community is what we're gathering.

**SHELLY CARLSON:** And 2009, and 2010, and 2011--

**NINA MOINI:** Right, right.

**SHELLY** --to name a few.

**CARLSON:**

**NINA MOINI:** So the flood risk is increasing on the river. Can you talk about the Metro Flood Diversion Project? What's underway right now? Because we're seeing here this impacts some 200,000 people.

**SHELLY** Yes. So it's Metro Flood Diversion Authority, and we have a joint powers agreement between the city of Moorhead, the city of Fargo, Cass County, North Dakota, Clay County, Minnesota, and several watershed districts. **CARLSON:** It's a 13-member board of elected officials that we came together after the 2009 flood and said, we need to do something to save our communities. We can't do this every single year.

It's a \$3.2 billion project, and it is a split delivery project, meaning that we have a public private partnership with an entity that is doing the channel, the 30-mile channel that is along the western side of West Fargo. And then in the lower half, in the southern embankment is what we call it, that's the US Army Corps of Engineers that is building that embankment and put in three different control structures, so basically, smaller dams.

So when we are facing a flood event, then we are able to hold that water back, and so there is a holding area in the southern part. Because the Red River is unique, it flows north.

**NINA MOINI:** Right.

**SHELLY** So we can hold it and we can divert a lot of water around the metro community. We also have two kind of very **CARLSON:** unique components of the diversion project. They're aqueducts. So you have a river that flows over the river. And they're heated aqueducts, because we want to make sure that the fish don't get too cold.

Then there's all the in-town flood mitigation work that had to happen. And specifically in the city of Moorhead, we had to buy out hundreds of homes, and we had to build berms along the river. And we also had to redo a lot of our lift stations. So we needed \$18 million to be able to finish this. And we got that, and we're going to get it done by next year, so it's really exciting. It's very exciting to not be in the flood mitigation business.

**NINA MOINI:** Well, it's nice too, to get the ins and outs behind how things are working at the city level and how the city is working with the state level and the county level, just to make sure things flow--

**SHELLY** Yes.

**CARLSON:**

**NINA MOINI:** --I guess, how they're supposed to. So we got to look at the Red River. We went to Bluestem Prairie. We stopped by there. We've just been having a great time. And I was talking with you before the show and saying, I grew up in the South Metro, in Apple Valley, and I have never made it up here in my whole life. So it's just kind of a reminder to be aware of what's going on around the state and making the time to go visit. So if you had to pitch to folks to come visit Moorhead, the Fargo-Moorhead area, give us your quick pitch.

**SHELLY** Yeah. I would say that there's just more to do in Moorhead. There's just more to love here. We have the river, but **CARLSON:** we have the river walk so you can walk along the river. You can kayak on the river We have Bluestem, where we have really cool concerts, and really cool musicals and plays every year.

We have great people, and there is such a diverse community as well. We have a lot of very ethnic restaurants here, and it's really the people. And, of course, come to The Loop. Come to The Loop and take a walk around. And there's a lot to do here. So I would say, come on up and enjoy this beautiful area of the Red River Valley.

**NINA MOINI:** Well, Mayor Carlson, thank you for stopping by and helping us kick off the show here in Moorhead.

**SHELLY** Absolutely.

**CARLSON:**

**NINA MOINI:** We appreciate your time.

**SHELLY** We're so happy you're here.

**CARLSON:**

**NINA MOINI:** Thank you so much, Moorhead Mayor Shelly Carlson. So we are going to go to the audience now.