

# A Project for the Next 100 Years: Clippership Wharf



Nicholas Iselin, General Manager of Lendlease Development in Boston. *Image courtesy of Mike Casey*

Less than a month ago, Lendlease held the official opening ceremony for Clippership Wharf, a mixed-use project in East Boston that [has been years in the making](#). This is the company's first major development in the city and, so far, only the first phase of the new waterfront community has been completed. The second is scheduled for delivery in 2020.

Sitting on a seven-acre post-industrial site, the project, designed by The Architectural Team, includes Clippership Apartments (284 units), Slip65 (80 condos), both open, and Slip45 (114 condos), which is still underway. The affordable housing component—22 apartments and 30 condos—will be delivered next fall. Residents will have access to 10,000 square feet of dining and retail space, including a destination restaurant, commuter café, fitness center, boating and recreational facilities.

The landscape architects at Halvorson Design Partnership envisioned saltwater marshes, rocky beaches and wildlife habitats to bring the site of the city's abandoned historic wharves to life. Outdoor facilities encompass a kayak center, a boat dock but also water taxis, among others. Two outdoor sculptures and a gallery aiming to promote the local art scene are already available to the public.

Nicholas Iselin, general manager for Lendlease Development in Boston, takes us through the stages of developing the project that, he says, will not be outdated in the century ahead.

**Redeveloping urban waterfronts, many of them former industrial areas, is trending in several U.S. metros. What can you tell us about the particularities of such a project?**

**Iselin:** At Clippership Wharf in East Boston, the site offers a fairly unique proposition for post-industrial, waterfront development, featuring unprecedented transit options, an emerging neighborhood, and some of the best views anywhere of the Boston skyline. It sits on a 7-acre site in East Boston, overlooking Boston Harbor, and will combine a dynamic public realm with features including amenities and art, to create a community where people can thrive. The development will deliver a key stretch of the East Boston waterfront back to the community, with a significant addition to what is now a 39-mile harborwalk, including recreational opportunities, and a new living shoreline.

When developing on the Boston waterfront, there is a complex tangle of regulatory and environmental reviews that must be navigated in addition to the rigorous planning and neighborhood processes. Various city, state, and federal regulatory agencies have purview over setbacks, building heights, public amenities, wildlife, waste site cleanup, flood plains and more. Many of the regulations are created by looking at historical data versus predicting what may happen in the future. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, for instance, is a rear-view looking statute, setting flood zone data based on historic events. With sea levels continuing to rise and the frequency of storms defying expectations, we set out to create a project that wasn't just compliant, but one that would be sustainable for decades.



For example, we raised the occupiable areas of the site much higher than required, creating a 14-foot buffer from the current mean high tide to the ground floor level of apartments and amenities. When we proposed elements such as these during the permitting process three years ago, there was considerable push back on the notion that we would raise our site so far (6 to 8 feet to our plaza level) above the surrounding network of roadways and sidewalks.

We eventually won the right to do so, largely because our 7-acre site allowed for gracious transitions from the plaza level to the waterfront and for other urban design trade-offs not normally achievable in lot-line developments. Ironically, many of the features we fought hard to protect during the entitlement phase of our project would be asked for, if not required of us, today. This is a prime example of how far the dialogue around climate resilience has come in just a few short years.

### **Clippership Wharf is a climate-resilient development. How important is this aspect in the future of multifamily development in urban areas?**

**Iselin:** Extremely. At Lendlease, it is especially important for us as long-term owners of the projects we create. For context, we have put sustainability at the heart of our business since its beginning in 1958. It is a fundamental part of our vision “*to create the best places.*” We recognize that the benefits of sustainable development must extend beyond a reduction in the environmental footprint to deliver places that are more operationally efficient, focus on human health and wellness, and are designed and built to be more resilient to maintain value over the longer term.

Not only is designing for climate resilience the right thing to do from an environmental standpoint but combining health and wellbeing aspects with sustainable and resilient features will ensure that our projects are appealing for tenants and buyers not just today, but well into the future. When we focus on consuming less energy, building with environmentally friendly materials, providing better daylight levels and ventilation, designing with native plantings and protecting against the threat of climate change with proactive design, we have a great story to tell around resilience. In urban areas, it is particularly important because new, large scale waterfront developments are becoming the first

lines of defense for protecting low-lying and vulnerable communities, especially historic ones.



View from the Clippership Wharf. *Image courtesy of Aram Boghosian*

### **What was the most challenging part of the Clippership project so far and how did you overcome it?**

**Iselin:** The most challenging part was convincing the regulatory and review agencies that raising the grades at the site was the correct planning approach. Beyond that, and related to it, was managing a contaminated site—a dual incentive, along with providing for climate resilience, for elevating the site. These issues provided both planning and engineering challenges, not to mention how to incorporate and justify the cost premiums they introduced to the development.

The key to overcoming the planning challenge is what I like to call the triple bank shot of the project. It involved convincing the Boston Housing Authority to convince the Boston Planning and Development Agency to allow the housing authority to put out a request for proposals for a neighboring parcel as part of our planning approvals. Then, we needed to win the RFP and design and construct a new project that would not only house Clippership Wharf's affordable housing component (more than our requirement, by the way),



but provide a new view corridor and neighborhood connection through our site to the waterfront. No problem, right? This was the urban planning trade-off that allowed us to implement our site solution.

As for solving the engineering and cost problems, we were convinced that the investment in a resilient solution and the creative and unique site features and public realm that yielded, would distinguish our project from our competitors. We have already seen positive results from the market with a successful condominium sell-through.



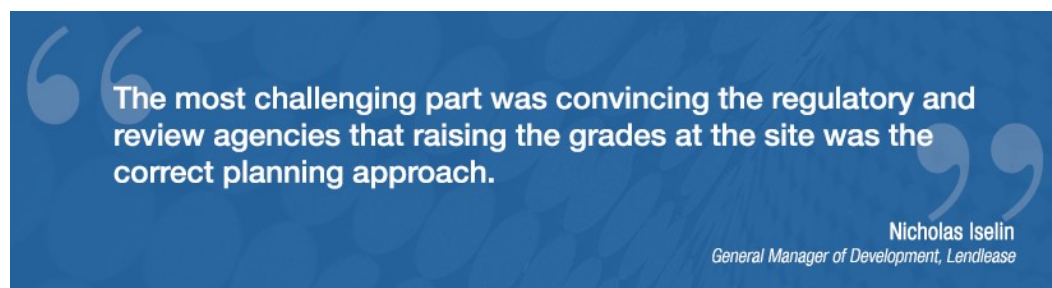
Clippership Wharf. *Image courtesy of Aram Boghosian*

## **Tell us about Phase 1 of Clippership Wharf. What innovations did it bring to the market?**

**Iselin:** Phase I of Clippership Wharf includes 284 apartments, 80 condominiums, a restaurant and café, a kayak center and considerable amenities for the residents and the public. First occupancies began in August 2019. As the most resilient new project on the Boston waterfront, it will include several innovations that make it unique in the marketplace. As discussed, we have raised our project significantly above the current flood plain. While raising the ground plain is not an innovation per se, it was the creative approach to the height limitations imposed by building codes, the high-rise code, and

local and state regulations that allowed us to achieve the extra height required to raise the grade and still stay compliant.

In essence, we were the first project in Boston to not be penalized for implementing a resilient solution. We also created a first of its kind “living shoreline” for Boston’s inner harbor, featuring salt marshes, rocky beaches, wildlife habitats and a kayak launch, allowing for a different type of public access to the waterfront than any other development. The project will also generate enough solar energy to power the equivalent of 35-40 homes a year. Clippership Wharf has achieved the LEED Neighborhood Development Silver certification, which is awarded to developments that help create more sustainable and well-connected neighborhoods. The development is targeting a LEED Midrise Homes certification at the Platinum level.



Clippership Wharf also employs a system of deployable flood barriers that can be installed in anticipation of a serious storm event. Even though the grade of the residential floors is raised, we still need to touch the surrounding roadways and sidewalks at building lobbies, garage entries and retail spaces. These low-lying areas will be protected from water infiltration by the barriers while still allowing the buildings to be accessed at the plaza level. This strategy will ensure that the project will not require modifications due to sea level rise for the foreseeable future and beyond. We like to describe Clippership Wharf as a 100-year project. Only time will tell.

### **How will the Clippership Wharf impact Boston’s multifamily sector?**

**Iselin:** In our development business, sustainability is built into our approach, and with this project, we have helped to set a precedent for how Boston waterfront development should be approached by pioneering the integration of resilience into Clippership Wharf.

The City of Boston also recently released “Resilient Boston Harbor,” a climate-ready vision to enhance Boston’s waterfront and protect the city’s neighborhoods from sea level rise and flooding due to climate change. This is an issue that Boston will continue to look

at carefully, and we hope that Clippership Wharf can serve as a model to other developers seeking to incorporate resilience and sustainability into their sites.

### **What is the next stage for Clippership Wharf? What's ahead for this project?**

**Iselin:** Because of that [sales at Slip65] success, we expedited the delivery of Slip45 condominiums, the second and final phase at Clippership Wharf. Sales began in June of this year and are already 75 percent sold. Apartments are now leasing and move-ins began in August.