

SHARED SPACES

Keep It Local, Make It Social

Multifamily Success Strategies Emphasize Community

By Tom Schultz | Special to Banker & Tradesman | Nov 24, 2019 | [Reprints](#) | [Unlock Link](#) | [Print](#)



AvalonBay Communities' 350,000-square-foot Avalon Residences at the Hingham Shipyard blends New England architecture with modern elements in a coastal setting. Image courtesy of TAT

In an ever-more-competitive regional housing market, how can the best new condominium and apartment buildings stand apart and attract today's discerning tenants?

Across Greater Boston and throughout New England, convenience and a sense of community are in demand. To plan for successful multifamily developments, an understanding of market desires is key, and savvy developers can differentiate their projects through an emphasis on designs that incorporate practical amenities and a creative mix of uses, and that integrate closely into their surrounding neighborhoods.

In our work, TAT has found that these elements appeal to a wide demographic base, from Millennials to empty nesters, and that they can be integrated in both market-rate and affordable properties – satisfying a desire for socialization, authenticity and easy access to retail and entertainment across all market segments.

Placemaking Remains a Priority

Walkable or transit-oriented properties with easy access to public transit, restaurants and cultural attractions remain vital elements in any development portfolio. In fact, more developers and their design teams are finding value in tapping into local character. Projects that respond to the size, scale and the materials of their existing neighborhoods have much stronger and more enduring sense of place.

This is an especially powerful trend in New England, which has a renowned and well-defined architectural heritage. TAT recently worked with AvalonBay Communities on the new Avalon Residences at the Hingham Shipyard – a single, 350,000-square-foot structure that fits seamlessly into its waterfront residential community thanks to a design that blends classic New England coastal architectural cues like shingled siding with a modern attitude and contemporary approach such as contrasting dark metal facade elements. This coastal location also creates value for prospective tenants by opening up new transit options: The project offers easy access to both commuter rail and ferry service.

Strategic combinations of adaptive reuse and new construction are also gaining in popularity, especially in districts where historic character is a draw for tenants or buyers. Smart developers recognize that this approach can maintain the authentic feel of a streetscape while enhancing a development site's value with additional residential units.

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In Boston's South End, The Davis Cos. and TAT are mixing adaptive reuse and new construction at 100 Shawmut, integrating an existing 6-story brick warehouse structure with a contemporary addition to create a 231,880-square-foot, 13-story residential condominium property. The addition allows the project team to bring 138 condominium units and a park to this burgeoning urban destination, while preserving the sense of place that differentiates the neighborhood and its multifamily offerings.

Combining adaptive reuse with new construction also works for the very top of the residential market.

In Boston's desirable Beacon Hill neighborhood a new project by developers CCM, called The Archer Residences, is transforming two former university buildings, adding townhouse-style entrances at street level and two contemporary ultra-luxe rooftop penthouses above. Being able to choose such a unique living experience just steps from Boston Common is a major draw for buyers who want contemporary design and amenities in a city center setting, and the project is anticipated to be one of Boston's most exclusive properties when it opens early next year.

Support Social Opportunities

Everyone in the development community recognizes that amenities are essential in attracting tenants and buyers. The question then becomes, what ties a property's offerings into a successfully integrated and resident-responsive package?



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In today's multifamily world, the common thread is connectivity and convenience. People want to be more active and find better ways to engage with their communities and fellow residents, but they also want amenities that respond to an evolving work/life balance. When it comes to shared spaces that add the most value, important trends to consider include workspaces with flexible benching systems, community-focused retail operations, and landscaped outdoor areas with public uses.

Some of these amenities can be programmed fairly easily into a multifamily development. For example, in addition to traditional amenities such as a fitness center and resident lounge, TAT's design for Alexan Wrentham, a 240-unit multifamily Trammell Crow Residential complex, also includes workstations that appeal to a growing demographic of remote workers and freelancers. Incorporating flexible benching systems, individual booths and privacy pods – along with good WiFi – into a large central amenity space was a low-impact, high-value way for the development team to boost their property's appeal.

Across the region, TAT has been including these productivity-focused amenities in a number of successfully marketed projects – including Greystar's 282-unit Elan Union Market project in Watertown – a clear sign that developers find success when they respond to shifting lifestyle needs.

Outdoor Space is Precious

Similarly, tenants value accessible outdoor space more than ever before. This is especially true in Boston proper and in surrounding urban areas. Many developers are finding success by reclaiming previously inaccessible space for tenant use, and in some cases for use by the public at large.

Lendlease's Clippership Wharf is a great example. This 12-acre, 478-unit community, which just opened in East Boston and was designed by TAT, offers residents and community members access to a harborwalk, beachfront area and floating dock with a kayak launch. This is a level of direct waterfront connection that's rare for a major city, and it provides a dramatic and valuable point of differentiation: The project's first phase of condos sold out in eight weeks.

In addition to public space, other tenant- and community responsive services can bolster a multifamily property. A practical mix of uses, such as the ground-level grocery store in Trinity Financial's new 83-unit, mixed-income Treadmark project in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood, helps to drive the kind of foot traffic that enhances visibility and awareness in competitive markets.

As another benefit, a retail operation providing essential goods can be a highly successful and stable tenant, bringing useful ancillary income while offering residents a level of convenience that is highly desirable. For a project like Treadmark – with 51 affordable rental units, 20 condominium homes targeted at up to 110 percent of AMI, and 12 market-rate condominium homes – the inclusion of community-responsive uses reflects a growing awareness in that expanded housing opportunities and high-value amenities can go hand-in-hand. The extension of these differentiating services and amenities across market segments will only become more important as the need for affordable housing increases.

Many developers are also bolstering these retail or service operations with public realm improvements. The Elan Union Market project sits across a shared driveway from a retail hub, creating a lively and engaging pedestrian connection from one site to the next. Running along the complex is a new sidewalk and a 10-foot-wide bicycle path, helping to link the community path to Watertown Square; a small parcel adjacent to the buildings has been converted into a park, so the whole town benefits from this new property's development.

It's a perfect example of how the best Greater Boston multifamily projects are succeeding because they respond to the market and reflect the needs of their residents and the surrounding community. Thoughtfully designed and programmed properties are a perfect opportunity for the development community to create lasting value.

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