

## Resident Wish List: Part 1



By Barbara Ballinger | February 21, 2025

A new year begets wishes for many residents, and those cited most often these days are low maintenance and services to help simplify living, strong internet connections, safety and security, fitness facilities and pet-friendly rules and spaces to pamper them. Including several or all can make a difference in attracting residents and retaining them as many now stay longer than they once did due to mortgage rates and prices remaining high, says Meghann Van Dorn, IIDA LEED AP ID+C, Director of Interior Design for The Architectural Team (TAT). Many also seek residences that reflect the latest design trends seen in model homes, magazines and design sites, and on TV. “They don’t want to live in a property that looks out of date,” Van Dorn says. Here’s more of what was heard, which can help guide companies in their decision-making capabilities. Part Two of this article will be featured in the next issue of units.

### **Smaller suburban markets.**

Developers are turning to smaller suburban markets underserved by modern multifamily buildings, says Jillian Dorell, Director of Design, Larken Associates, Branchburg, N.J. Lower development costs and favorable demographics make it possible to construct large amenity-rich communities in such areas, she says. At Monte View at Pohatcong in Pohatcong Township, N.J., the company is building a 120-unit community in a location that has the advantage of being across the Delaware River from Pennsylvania. “While it’s a non-traditional market for multifamily development, the

location offers renters a luxury living experience at a fraction of the cost compared to areas closer to Philadelphia and New York City,” she says.

### **Easy, convenient, sustainable living.**

How to lower maintenance and make life easier manifests itself in multiple ways. TAT extends quartz countertops along the back walls in kitchens for a seamless, easier-to-maintain surface than painted gypsum board. “Many residents also like the look since it connotes a higher-end finish,” says Van Dorn. The desire for easier living also leads to more hardwood flooring and luxury vinyl planks in bedrooms rather than carpet, which is harder to clean and not as hypoallergenic, she says. Good, basic appliances with stainless steel fronts are another option residents are searching for, according to John Carroll, Principal with Charleston, S.C.-based Lakeland Capital. Granite countertops may be more expensive than laminate but the company, which focuses on value-add properties, finds that it’s a worthwhile upfront investment, along with dishwashers and tackling deferred maintenance. Easy living also means that property management responds quickly to residents’ needs, says Chris Fletcher, Executive Vice President, Development with Atlanta-based Cortland. Some will pay a slight premium for that extra ease-of-living lifestyle. Also desired is reliable internet service throughout a property. “This matters more than flashier features,” he says. Easy living also shows up in sustainable materials, systems and choices that last, a request especially among younger renters, who want access to transit, groceries, walking trails, smoke-free buildings, car sharing and even water bottle filling stations, says Brad Mawhinney, Vice President of Operations, GMH Communities, a Newtown Square, Penn.-based developer.

### **Security and safety.**

How this translates depends on the property, its price point and design, but many set up gates to enter with a code to input and an app to operate a smart lock in a unit so they don’t have to worry about keys for themselves, guests and outside maintenance staff. Garages may be enclosed and well-lit and also require codes to enter. For outside lots, buildings try to ensure safety with good illumination, gated digital access, CCTV security cameras and fencing, says Jeff Klotz, founder and Chief Executive Officer of The Klotz Group of Companies. The goal is to use systems that aren’t complicated, says Fletcher, who adds that for more of his company’s new builds, it incorporates EV stations, which make it easier for drivers to avoid searching for a charging system outside their property. At more urban luxury properties, GMH Communities staffs buildings with a concierge, Mawhinney says.

### **Mixing uses.**

One of the newer trends is for more mixed-use within a community so residents need to leave a building less often, what Behring Co. terms “full stack.” In the company’s 1900 Broadway tower and adjacent 1950 Franklin office building—which Behring recently acquired to create a connected “urban campus”—there are offices and co-working, access to mass transit and private EV car share fleets to avoid needing a car, plus restaurants, retail and a gym, a concept the firm hopes to roll out

in other gateway high-tech markets. Larken has added EV charge stations for residents, retailers and customers coming to shop. “We’ve had great success doing this,” says Dorell.

### **Themed planned communities.**

Residents seek a sense of community and one way for them to gain this is by living in a master-planned community where a mix of styles and price offer choice and large swaths of land set aside permanently for active and passive use, says architect Mike Aziz, AIA, LEED AP, Partner at New York City-based Cooper Robertson. Among the newer trends is to encourage those who live nearby but outside the community to make use of the open space and resources. “In generations past, there was no investment in the community spaces and little desire to make each unique, but that’s changed,” Aziz says. In an indication of how that approach has changed, Aziz points to examples from around the country including the Avalon development in Alpharetta, Ga., where the town center bisects open space where movies, yoga classes and other activities take place. “The developer wants to make public spaces come alive to draw in people from the outside,” he says. The Tenmile River Master Plan transforms a decommissioned state psychiatric campus into a vibrant new Hudson Valley, N.Y., community. Many are also now designed with a theme to unify parts, especially if different builders design different housing. Some themes reflect “agrihood” and New Urbanism similar to Serenbe near Atlanta or those found in Catskills, Hudson Valley or Adirondack living in New York. Or they may be designed for second home living, the case with Silo Ridge near Amenia, N.Y., with trout fishing. Many also include a retail/commercial component with experiential uses, and sometimes loft living above “stores.” More are adding hotels, inns and restaurants to meet demand, as Serenbe did. The overall aesthetic varies, often inspired by an area’s architectural vernacular and landscaping, Aziz says.

### **Integrated communities, outside and inside.**

Even when there isn’t an overall master plan, many developers work to integrate their buildings into the community and neighborhood more seamlessly, says Dorell. Larken tries to do this by reflecting the environment whether rural or urban. It also seeks ways for residents to engage more with peers through events that foster neighborly connections. Diana Pittro, Executive Vice President with Chicago-based RMK Management Corp., pegs the change to life after COVID-19 and residents wanting to feel less isolated. Her property management firm organizes a comprehensive schedule of creative events, from game nights to yoga by the pool, get-to-know-you dinners and holiday parties but varies them by location, type of community and demographic. “High-rise buildings sometimes do social events on site but can also host at a nearby restaurant,” she says. Events that work well are kid-, pet-, wellness-related and seasonal. Also popular are free coffee bars and refreshment centers. What’s faded in popularity, Pittro says, are door drops, since the giveaways proved wasteful and didn’t foster face-to-face interactions, and on-the-go breakfast events. Also, more underused amenity spaces are repurposed based on trends such as racquetball into pickleball courts or open common areas into private conference rooms.

## **A Developer's Wish List**

The goal remains to make a profit but it's become harder with upward pressure on operating and construction costs due to increases in labor costs, capital and interest rates and the downward pressure by residents to lower rents, says developer Jeff Klotz. "More tend to be happy to break even on projects they started a few years back before interest rates rose," he says. And there's also the pressure to keep amenities up to date by addressing and changing them every two to five years, he says. "A pool is still a pool but styles change and wear and tear occurs, and we need to change the finishes, tile, furnishings," he says. Keeping your property and its amenities fresh, updated, clean and ready to use is a requirement that is often overlooked, Klotz says.

### **[Read part 2!](#)**

*Barbara Ballinger is a freelancer for units. She is the co-author of 20 books; her latest is Kitchen Conversation: Sharing Secrets to Kitchen Design Success (Images Publishing).*