

# Multifamily TRENDS<sup>®</sup>

SPRING 2003 ■ VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2



**Making It**  
**The Mid-Atlantic**  
**Market Soars**

**Interior Motives**

**Energy Incentives**

**RECEIVED**

ASLA  
Professional Practice Library  
636 Eye Street, NW APR 10 2003  
Washington, DC 20001

Jefferson at Clarendon Centre in Arlington, Virginia, creates a gateway to the Clarendon neighborhood.



© DORSKY HODGSON + PARTNERS

Developing multifamily housing along D.C.'s Metrorail transit corridors, industry professionals capitalize on the benefits of mass transit residential projects.

SANDY SILVERMAN

**D**riven by market imperatives and municipal smart growth initiatives, a wave of high-density residential development is underway along Metrorail transit corridors in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Whether designed as stand-alone multifamily communities or as residential components of mixed-use complexes, these projects offer a preview of urban redevelopment's future in the mid-Atlantic region.

Even though transit-oriented residential projects are successfully engaging today's residential market, they also pose a number of development, design, and construction challenges that must be resolved to achieve market success. As Dorsky Hodgson + Partners, a national architecture, planning, and interiors firm with an office in the nation's capital, has learned through its involvement in site planning and design for transit-oriented projects, each site's unique

# Designing the

characteristics fundamentally affect the timetable and efficiency of the development process.

A Metrorail station's location in relation to the residential development, current vehicular and pedestrian flows, topographic conditions, and neighborhood character must all be given careful thought when such a project is considered. Ultimately, a new residential development must enliven its surroundings and bring increased vitality to an existing lower-density neighborhood.

### **Transit Design Solutions**

Rising near the Clarendon Metro Station in Arlington, Virginia, are two new developments that illustrate both the market potential of and the design challenges inherent in transit-oriented projects.

Now under construction is the 11-story Jefferson at Clarendon Centre, with 252 rental apartments and more than 14,000 square feet of ground-floor neighborhood retail space, located one block south of the Metro station. Situated in the commercial core of Clarendon, the project is surrounded by a predominantly residential area, with a pedestrian flow that is expected to appeal to prospective retail tenants.

However, three major roadways—Washington Boulevard, Tenth Street, and Highland Street—define the triangular-shaped site, presenting a unique set of mixed-use design challenges. Key issues in approaching this project were the placement of the building's front door, garage, and service entries, as well as the prime location for the main retail spaces. By incorporating architectural features at the three corners of the site, including roof structure design elements, accent lighting, and a public plaza with a clock tower at one corner, Dorsky Hodgson highlighted the prime retail locations, as well as created a gateway to the Clarendon neighborhood.

While Jefferson at Clarendon Centre's dense, urban setting is a draw, it also demands visual and functional separation from retail and public plaza areas to ensure residents' privacy. A separate entrance and lobby will be reserved for residents, as will amenities that include an outdoor pool, a rooftop deck, a health club, a party room, underground parking, and a business center.

Just a block from the Clarendon Metro Station in the opposite direction is the Hartford Condominium, a 70-unit, six-story building

with loft-style residences now nearing completion. "Everyone in the Washington area realizes the value of Metro," says Jonathan B. Cox, vice president of the Holladay Corporation, the Washington, D.C.-based developer of the Hartford. "The Hartford's boutique condominium was sold out last April—early in the construction process. Our buyers value living in an urban area where restaurants and shopping are convenient and walkable. They want proximity to Metro, whether or not they commute to work."

Dorsky Hodgson designed the Hartford—the residential component of a major mixed-use development that also includes a nine-story, 200,000-square-foot office building. Both residential and office buildings are situated above a common underground parking garage. A brick-paved "festival street" running between the two buildings can be closed to vehicular traffic for special occasions, when it functions as a pedestrian plaza hosting kiosks and crowds.

The community wanted the building to express the unique conditions of the site. As such, one side of the residential condominium faces the new nine-story office building, while the other side faces a park and an eclectic existing single-family residential neighborhood.

While meeting the client's need to use the same interior unit plan on both sides of the building's corridor, the firm radically modified the facade design of the two sides of the structure following the community's response to the various contexts of the building. For example, the facade facing the residential community was broken up into vertical bay window modules to create more of a townhouse character to better relate to the residential scale of the neighborhood.

### **A Leading Multifamily Market**

New transit-oriented residential and mixed-use projects such as Jefferson at Clarendon Centre and the Hartford are enjoying market success throughout the Washington metropolitan area. Traffic congestion beyond the beltway, a relatively resilient job market, and new downtown amenities are creating a back-to-the-city movement that is boosting development and redevelopment in the District of Columbia, Arlington and Fairfax counties in Virginia, and Montgomery and Prince George's counties in Maryland.

# Urban Future

Although the technology sector shakeout of 2000 has slowed job growth, studies indicate that the long-term economic prospects for the Washington metropolitan area remain positive. In addition, it has one of the highest per-capita incomes in the country, with a large group of single, well-educated professionals who appreciate the city's unique cultural offerings, restaurants, and clubs.

Washington also is known for its clean, efficient, and still-growing Metro transit system. Since opening on March 27, 1976, Metro has continually increased its ridership by extending its transit lines and, most recently, with the initial approval of a Dulles Airport extension. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2002, the Metrorail lines carried 181 million riders—roughly 500,000 a day.

As a result of such positive factors, and municipalities' desire to maximize use of limited land and existing services through smart growth, Washington is leading the mid-Atlantic region in transit-oriented residential and mixed-use projects. These high-density solutions for urban infill sites offer opportunities for innovative linkages with transit stations. For instance, project designers can create grade-separated pedestrian walkways—overpasses above busy arteries or wide, attractively landscaped ground-level sidewalks—that improve residents' access to the nearby Metro station. Another option, still in its infancy, is the use of shared space in parking garages for commuters and office workers during the day, and for community residents at night.

Thanks to its demographics, Washington has one of the strongest urban apartment markets in the nation, according to Gregory H. Leisch, chief executive of Delta Associates, a real estate market research company in Alexandria, Virginia. The firm's year-end 2002 survey of 140,000 units shows a mere 2.8 percent vacancy rate in the metropolitan area. Also, approximately 5,600 new rental units were absorbed in 2002, the highest number in any metropolitan area in the United States.

Leisch says apartments located close to Metro transit lines are in high demand and command higher rents than those in suburban locations. "Traditionally, apartments have served as an entry for younger people, but now the market is also fueled by baby boomers seeking close-in locations," he says. "Affluent empty nesters also see rental housing in the city as an attractive lifestyle alternative."

Low interest rates and the arrival of modern, attractive high rises with superior amenities also have drawn condominium buyers to transit-oriented locations. The success of for-sale developments like the Hartford indicates that the urban condominium marketplace may be underserved, at least in the Washington area.

"Today, people will pay more in this market to live in a high rise with amenities and security, whereas in the 1980s they didn't see the advantages," says Timothy D. Smith, senior vice president of LCOR, a developer based in Bethesda, Maryland. The firm is developing Westmoreland House, a 16-story, 397-unit high-rise apartment building adjacent to the Huntington Metro Station in Alexandria, Virginia, and Wilton House, a 16-story, 257-unit high-rise residential development that is part of a mixed-use project with a Marriott Courtyard hotel across the street from the Dunn Loring Metro Station and Interstate 66.

### Encouraging Smart Growth

Throughout the metropolitan area, municipal governments are encouraging smart growth through incentives for infill residential development. Local zoning boards often have granted higher densities for residential projects in transit districts, compared with office or retail developments, in an effort to energize urban neighborhoods.

In addition, most counties in the D.C. area have reduced their parking requirements from the traditional 1.6 cars per unit to just over one car per unit for residential projects within a specified distance of a transit station. The resulting reduction in cost can have a positive impact on a project's financial viability.

**Twin Oak, in Rosslyn, Virginia, takes advantage of the county's planning goals to provide affordable housing in urban environments next to Metro stations.**



© DORSKY HODGSON + PARTNERS

**The Residences at Rosedale Park accommodates the diverse needs of the mixed-use project.**



© DORSKY HODGSON + PARTNERS

However, developers still face high land acquisition costs and project timelines of one or two years in order to assemble a suitable parcel, design an appropriate project, and comply with municipal zoning and use requirements. “One of the big challenges is just finding property and getting approval to begin development,” says Smith. “You have to allow a year or more to go through the rezoning as well.”

For example, two projects designed by Dorsky Hodgson—Westmoreland House and Wilton House—were the first buildings to be approved in Fairfax County, Virginia, under new planning guidelines that allow for increased density at Metro transit stations. LCOR spent more than a year helping to create a new zone for the county to allow up to 125 units per acre—well above the previous maximum of 40 units per acre.

Despite official encouragement of higher-density solutions, the “not in my backyard” or NIMBY factor remains an impediment for both developers and designers. In Dorsky Hodgson’s experience, what works best is a proactive approach: identifying key leaders early in the process, arranging community meetings, and reassuring everyone that a structure will visually enhance the existing neighborhood. “We had innumerable meetings with the neighborhood until late at night,” says Cox, referring to the Hartford, where design concessions to the community were necessary to gain approval of a higher-density project. “Basically, you just keep at it until you work it out.”

Project height is an issue in many urban neighborhoods. For Westmoreland House, for instance, the solution was a stepped building design that moderated residents’ concerns. “The majority of the neighbors supported Westmoreland House,” Smith says, “because they believe it will help bring stability to the area and spur further upgrading of their community.”

Developers also can strengthen ties and manage neighborhood issues by improving the streetscape, planting additional trees, or moving utilities underground. Also, new projects can bring much-needed retail services to a neighborhood, and increase pedestrian traffic and safety. Most important, a developer can convey the fact that new projects typically raise property values for existing residents, as well as for newcomers.

It is not uncommon for urban residential projects to be designed to accommodate specific neighborhood requests. Twin Oak, an 18-story, 320-unit residential development in Rosslyn, a neighborhood in Arlington County, Virginia, takes advantage of the

county’s planning goals to provide affordable housing in urban environments next to Metro stations. In order to replace the existing 55 garden-style affordable units, as was required under the existing special overlay affordable housing zone for this Arlington site, the developer, Washington-based Donohoe Companies, was successful in increasing the allowable density by more than 100 units. This enabled the developer to provide market-rate and affordable units in the same new high-rise structure, set in a high-demand location.

Dorsky Hodgson designed Twin Oak as a highly articulated stepped structure to minimize the project’s visual impact on an adjacent high-rise condominium, which helped to gain the community’s approval for the development. Twin Oak also contains underground parking for 350 cars, a landscaped deck and swimming pool, and a plaza with a freestanding community building, along with ground-floor retail uses at the highly trafficked corner adjacent to the building’s entrance.

### **Designing Projects from the Inside Out**

Design solutions must ensure that, despite the project’s intensive uses at ground level, the residential spaces provide “islands of privacy” attuned to varied lifestyles. According to Dorsky Hodgson’s experience, transit-oriented residential developments should be scaled at 200 to 400 units for rental communities or 75 to 150 for condominium residences. Site limitations generally preclude larger-scale projects, but a certain minimum density is necessary for management efficiency.

Residents appreciate a nice entryway, which may include a canopied entrance, a private lobby, and concierge service. At the same time, building services need to be moved to the back of the building or accommodated underground whenever possible. A typical unit mix for an urban setting would be dominated by studio, one-bedroom, and one-bedroom-plus-den units (collectively two-thirds of the total), with the balance consisting primarily of two-bedroom and a sprinkling of three-bedroom or penthouse-style units. “These projects must be designed from the inside out,” LCOR’s Smith says. “You have to start by knowing what unit sizes work in

See **URBAN FUTURE**, page 54

**URBAN FUTURE**, from page 33

the market. Creating a residential high rise is more like building a house than an office, so we hire only experienced residential contractors.”

To attract residents, an apartment or condominium community generally must offer a pool or fitness facility, a clubroom, a business center, and a game room—typically located off a main lobby or in another high-visibility area well above ground level to enhance marketing efforts while ensuring security and privacy. Prewiring for high-speed Internet access and 24-hour security systems also is essential in today’s market.

In-demand unit amenities typically include balconies, sunrooms, walk-in closets, separate dining areas, nine-foot ceilings, soaker tubs, a washer and a dryer, computer office space, and fireplaces. One impor-

tant element to have is two- and three-pane insulated windows to improve energy efficiency and reduce street and transit-line noise. Because security is so important to residents, most buildings are designed with one access point at the lobby, electronic control of residential elevators, and a single access door to the garage.

Good-quality interior finishes and high ceilings (nine feet or higher) commonly are found in new rental apartments and condominiums. This makes it easier for an owner to convert rentals into for-sale units in the future, while attracting upscale renters in the short term. Penthouses in both apartment and condominium projects continue to command significant premiums for their views and perceived prestige. “For a residential transit-oriented project to succeed, it must be attractive, look substantial, and

be appropriately scaled, with plenty of curb appeal—while keeping everything within budget,” notes LCOR’s Smith.

**Complex Mixed-Use Structures**

Lowering risk while maximizing the yield from premium properties, mixed-use design offers particular advantages for developers of transit-oriented projects, and for space users. Street-level restaurants and shops benefit from high pedestrian flows, while residents located in levels above the ground floor gain an extra measure of security.

One example of the application of the mixed-use approach is found at Belcrest Center, planned for the Prince George’s Metro Station in Hyattsville, Maryland, by Miami, Florida-based Taylor Development & Land Co. Located adjacent to an established regional shopping area, Belcrest Center will serve the University of Maryland at College Park, the Prince George’s County Metro Center office complex, and nearby residential neighborhoods. The overall development will include 170,000 square feet of retail space; a 12-story, 300,000-square-foot office building; 130 units of rental housing above the retail space; a separate 240-unit freestanding residential complex; and three parking garages for more than 1,900 cars.

Dorsky Hodgson’s design for Belcrest Center strives to create a 24/7 urban lifestyle environment in which pedestrian activity and street-oriented retail patterns energize the project’s public spaces and support foot traffic to the Metro station. Belcrest Center also will be linked to a recently completed pedestrian overpass across East-West Highway that will provide direct access from the shopping center across the street to the Metro station via the project.

Integrating retail and residential uses in a mixed-use complex can be a significant design challenge. For instance, ground-floor retail space needs greater floor-to-floor height (typically 15 to 18 feet) to be marketable, compared with the eight to ten feet between residential floors. That means the entire ground floor, including multifamily areas, must have higher ceilings, further influencing a developer’s cost considerations.

When restaurants are planned for the retail level, the placement of kitchen exhaust shafts becomes another design issue. Build-

## Need Practical Solutions for Complex Development Issues?

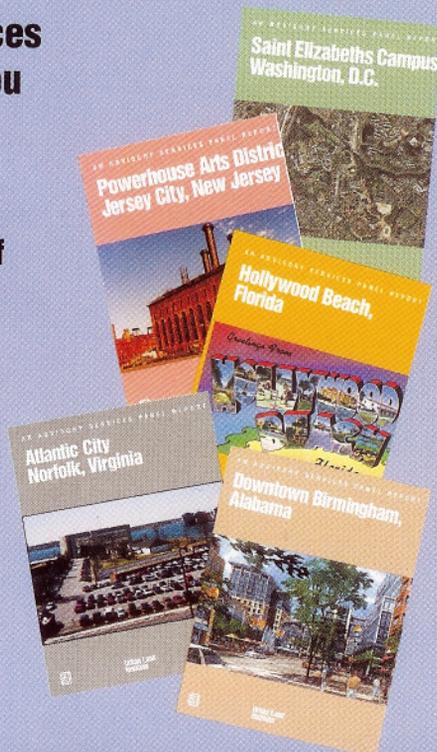
**ULI’s Advisory Services Program can take you to the next level . . .**

### **ACTION!**

**We’ll send you a team of top-level professionals to help you move your project forward.**

**It’s not just another plan—it’s a strategy.**

For information on Advisory Services options, contact Mary Beth Corrigan at 202-624-7136 or [marybeth@uli.org](mailto:marybeth@uli.org).



# Urban Land Institute



ing codes require these shafts to go to the roof; however, the exact size and location of restaurant space may not be known until leases are signed. Therefore, the designer must plan in advance for exhaust shafts to be put in several potential locations, such as around stairwells or elevator shafts.

Mixed-use design solutions may be complicated by the need to accommodate the existing transit station's surface car and bus lanes, subgrade transit lines, and pedestrian walkways, while addressing each site's geographic challenges and setback requirements.

Designing a garage to accommodate the diverse parking needs of retail shoppers, office employees, and building residents is one of the most complex issues in transit-oriented urban projects. While many workers and shoppers will arrive via the Metro station, an adequate number of daytime parking spaces must be provided, with easy pedestrian or elevator access to the building. For residents, parking security is a primary concern. Therefore, a garage may require separate resident entrances or secured parking floors accessible only to tenants or unit owners.

For instance, the Residences at Rosedale Park, a 164-unit rental complex with ground-floor retail uses now under construction in downtown Bethesda, Maryland, between the National Institutes of Health and Bethesda Metro stations, required a unique parking solution. The project design includes six- and eight-story buildings on opposite sides of the street. The site configuration allows for only one entry ramp for a garage and service area for both buildings, mandating a common three-level, 300-car underground garage that spans the below-street space between the two buildings.

#### Demand Will Continue

Based on the Washington market's positive demographic and economic trends, demand for transit-oriented residential developments is likely to continue for at least the next decade. According to market researcher Leisch, absorption rates for new rental and condominium communities are expected to remain strong, providing new opportunities for residential developers.

On the supply side, only a limited amount of land is available near transit sta-

tions, and not all developers are willing to tackle the complex land, design, and approval issues inherent in transit-oriented development. That means the inherent value of these projects is likely to rise faster than would be possible in communities lacking similar location advantages.

Over the next decade, transit-oriented residential communities will have a greater impact in the Washington market. Adapt-

ing and applying the principles of urban infill design to each location will be essential to capitalize fully on these development opportunities. ■

**SANDY SILVERMAN** IS A PARTNER IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C., OFFICE OF DORSKY HODGSON + PARTNERS, A FULL-SERVICE NATIONAL ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING, INTERIORS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHICS FIRM.

## Multifamily design *with style to spare.*



**With office locations near you!**

Des Moines  
Tampa  
Sacramento  
Chicago  
Phoenix  
Dallas  
Costa Mesa  
Jacksonville  
Orlando  
Boston



Architects and Planners, Inc.

**Bloodgood Sharp Buster**

[www.bsbdesign.com](http://www.bsbdesign.com)

For more information  
e-mail BSB at:  
[mfad@bsbdesign.com](mailto:mfad@bsbdesign.com)