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Tall Order

Mid-Rise and High-Rise Condominiums are Being Designed to Attract a Range of Buyers—They're Also Playing a Key Role in Urban Redevelopment

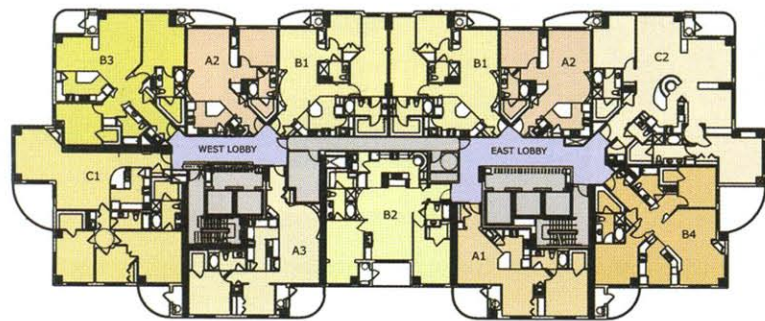
By Katie Weeks
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With interest rates still relatively low and the desire to own property continuing to drive buyers, mid-rise and high-rise condominium projects have developers and architects aiming high, literally and figuratively. Urban redevelopment projects such as Grant Park in Minneapolis are able to quickly change the character and face of a neighborhood and attract a range of buyers from empty nesters to no-nesters to young professionals.

Developed by **Asset Management Corp.**, a St. Louis Park, Minn.-based developer, Grant Park is located in Elliot Park, a neighborhood in down-

income housing. It also wanted to see an iconic piece, like a bell tower, that would signify the area's changing face. Combining the idea of a landmark with a perceived shift in the local real estate market toward condominiums, APEX and the project architect, Dallas-based **Humphreys & Partners Architects**, proposed the 27-story high-rise.

"Developers were all doing mid-rise projects of 60 to 80 unit developments. We were going to come online with almost 300 units. It was a big leap of faith," says Mark Humphreys, principal of Humphreys & Partners Architects. But, Lux recalls, "Part of our belief was that by making this successful—and an asset to the neighborhood and the city—we'd be



Grant Park, designed by Humphreys & Partners, has revitalized the surrounding Minneapolis neighborhood (above and below). A non-corridor arrangement (left) with two elevator lobbies results in greater privacy.

able to revitalize the entire neighborhood and the district."

What sets the tower apart? The 284 units are slightly smaller since APEX saw that bigger units in other neighborhoods were not moving. Other selling points: a large workout facility, common area with fireplace and indoor pool capped by an English glass conservatory. The design team also took the neighborhood aesthetics into mind, making sure the high-rise did not alienate its surroundings.

The tower's structure is another defining characteristic. "We wanted to do something unique instead of just the normal high-rise building with 180-ft. long corridors inside," says Humphreys. Individual elevator banks for each unit were not possible with 11 units per floor. Instead, the team

created a non-corridor arrangement. Humphreys designed two elevator lobbies connected by an unfinished fire corridor that is for safety purposes only—no units open onto that corridor. Instead, five to six units feed off of each lobby. "It was a much better, more private look to the buyers," notes Humphreys. The solution also made the accountants smile, increasing the building's efficiency by four percent. What's more, since the fire corridor is half the width of a normal corridor, the extra square footage was turned into sellable space, while the corridor's sparse finishes saved \$4 million in construction costs.

Creating a Community

Across the country, creating a unique community is also a goal for Florham Park, N.J.-based **Westminster Communities**. The construction division of **Kushner Cos.** is completing a number of mid-rise buildings as part of The Landings at HarborSide, an eight- to 10-year, multimillion dollar redevelopment project in Perth Amboy, N.J. When complete, the development will comprise 22

buildings and incorporate 2,100 residential units made up of town homes and mid-rise luxury condominiums, retail developments, a new waterfront promenade and several parks. The company is currently wrapping up Phase One, which includes six mid-rise buildings. The Admiral, the first to be completed, is a six-story building with 78 one-, two-, and three-bedroom units ranging in size from 900–2,500 sq. ft. that sold out in three weeks.

Westminster Communities primarily chose mid-rise buildings in response to zoning constraints. "The city wanted to have the new community be in harmony with what was existing, without overshadowing or taking away from the character that presently exists. That kind of limited the amount of stories that the buildings could grow," says Sam Gershwin, president of Westminster Communities. "It's an interesting process because the city has not experienced that before," he adds. "It's an education process for city professionals and the neighbors."

"We distinguish between the mid-rise condominium buildings and the townhouses or stacked flats by their entry systems," says Alan Melting, FAIA, AICP, a principal of The Lieberman Melting Partnership, a New York-based architectural and planning firm. "The condos are elevator dependent

and each floor has a public corridor—a very conventional building type. The stacked flats all have individual front doors, either on the street (a la brownstones) or off the courtyard." Melting adds, "Most of them are also floor-throughs with exposures to both the courtyard and street. The Admiral is predominantly condominiums; the Bayview is all stacked flats."

With a gross density of 45 to 50 units per acre, the mid-rise buildings capitalize on the site's placement along Perth Amboy's historic waterfront. Views are maximized and Westminster is rebuilding a half-mile of the waterfront



The Landings at HarborSide will add 22 buildings to Perth Amboy, N.J., as well as retail, a waterfront promenade and parks. The design challenge was to create an entire community that holds together aesthetically, isn't repetitious and links the greater community to the city of Perth Amboy.

with a new bulkhead and a marketplace on a rebuilt pier. The development will also include a four-mile waterfront promenade and five acres of new parkland. Each building also has an interior courtyard and landscaped sitting areas.

Similar Influences

While the Grant Park high-rise and the Landings at HarborSide mid-rises may differ in size, they have some shared characteristics. Both projects targeted a broad range of buyers and

have thus far attracted empty nesters, no nesters, and young professionals, a trend in urban redevelopment. The Grant Park tower has 160 pre-sales in about four months and the entire project sold out before completion, while the second building at The Landings at HarborSide, Bay View, is already 75 percent sold out with occupancy not slated until later this year.

For both developments, green space in the form of parks or secure courtyards, is a high selling point according to both developers. Another shared design element: parking structures that are effectively hidden from view. At Grant Park, a 500-car structure is hidden by townhomes, and a

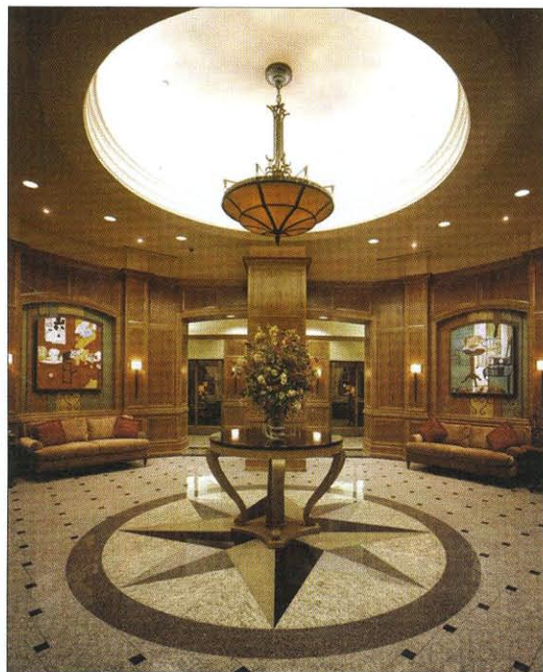
251-car garage at The Landings at Harbor Side is also concealed by the buildings.

"People still need their cars to travel, but garage doors are probably the least aesthetic feature of any building elevation," says Gershwin. An added bonus at Grant Park: The garage is tempered. "Construction argued to keep it open-air because it's cheaper to build," says Humphreys, "but who wants an open-air parking space in Minneapolis in February?"

town Minneapolis. The project's 27-story high-rise tower, which houses one-, two-, and three-bedroom units ranging from 853 sq. ft. to 1,937 sq. ft., is more than a new structure—it also marks a distinct shift for the once-blighted neighborhood.

"It was kind of a fringe neighborhood to downtown Minneapolis that hadn't seen any new developments in 40 to 50 years. Although it was only six to eight blocks from the heart of downtown, it was a neighborhood that had been cut off and split up in the 1960s when the freeways were put in," says Bob Lux, a principal with APEX Asset Management Corp.

Initially, the neighborhood organization, the **Elliot Park Neighborhood Inc.**, leaned toward 40 units of lower-



The Landings' developer, Kushner, transformed a former Naval Reserve training center into an award-winning sales and marketing center with two model units (above and right).

