

# 6 STEPS TO DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITIES

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HCM



Firefly Park - Block B, Frisco, TX

Master-planned communities (MPCs) are undoubtedly a significant undertaking – from considerable upfront costs for land acquisition and infrastructure, to lengthy regulatory and zoning processes, and complex planning and design considerations.





Firefly Park, Frisco, TX

In most cases, these critical pieces and parts of the development process are moving and evolving simultaneously, creating an even more challenging scenario. However, when the right team members and steps are put in place, the development process can become manageable, and when everyone is working in concert, we see the potential to result in communities that will shape the built environment of tomorrow.

After extensive experience working on master planned communities, we have identified six critical steps to creating a more seamless development process that acknowledges the ongoing challenges developers and their teams face. The following building blocks for success will help the often-overwhelming pieces and parts come together to manifest a cohesive, vibrant, and prosperous community.

# 6 STEPS TO SUCCESS

1 Set And Maintain A Vision

2 Create A Sense Of Place

3 Focus On Flexibility

4 Embrace the Ugly Side

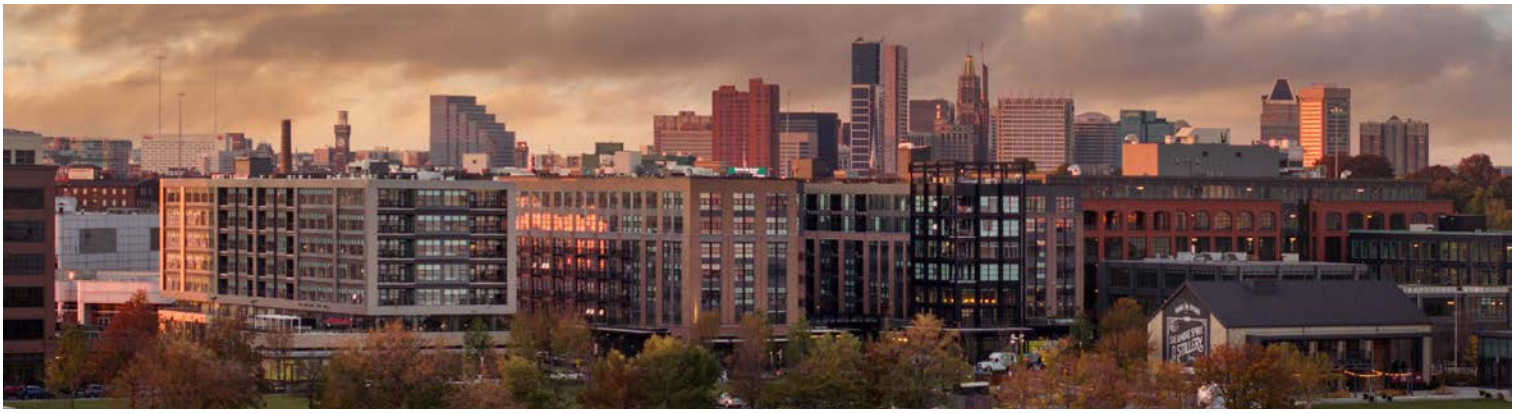
5 Plan For The Future

6 Pay Attention To Parking

# 1 SET AND MAINTAIN A VISION

The number one opportunity for success for any MPC is creating a central vision and having a team member responsible for articulating and maintaining this vision throughout the entire development process.

Each team member, partner, or consultant will have a separate scope of work, but will need to understand the larger picture. Maintaining a cohesive approach and holding a central vision is key to creating authenticity, as it sets the tone for the entire project and helps keep the combined team accountable. We have seen this done successfully by the master developer or by a master plan architect, but no matter who is leading the effort, the entire team needs to understand who is making the ultimate decision.



*PROJECT EXAMPLE*

## BALTIMORE PENINSULA

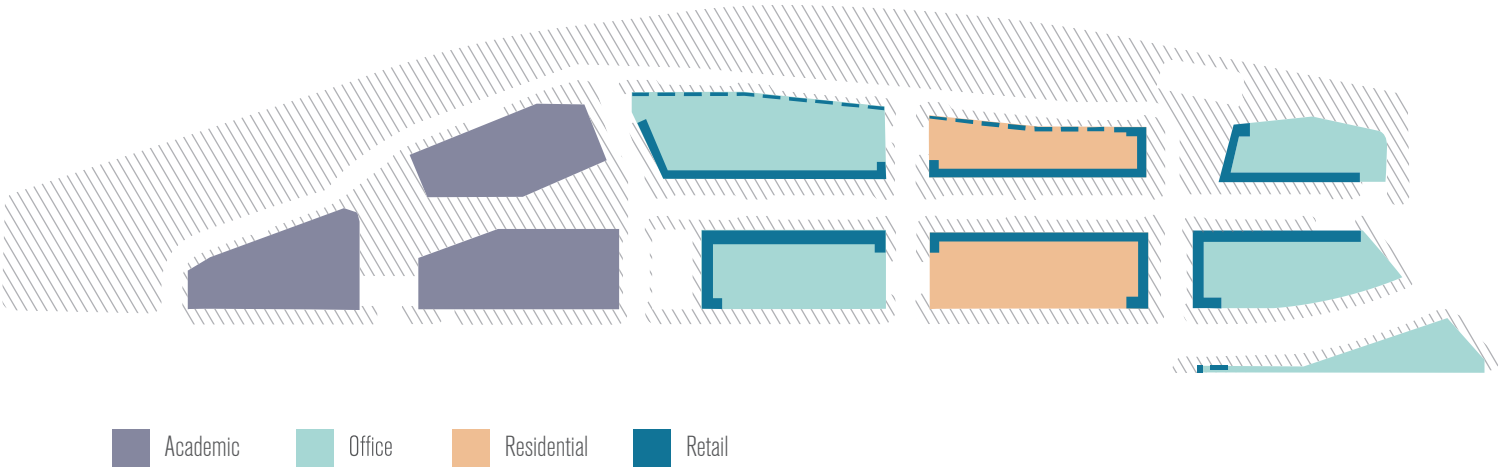
We were selected to design two mixed-use buildings for the new Baltimore Peninsula waterfront development in South Baltimore. Inspired by the site's history as a rail yard and industrial hub, we held an overarching vision of honoring the past while welcoming this neighborhood's exciting future. The vision translated into features such as building form and massing that contribute to the urban design goals and steel detailing, a reference to the site's industrial past, which reappears throughout the building in the form of canopies, balconies, bays, and trellises. Each building was reinterpreted into a modern expression of the site's history to weave the theme throughout the entire master-planned community. The shared vision yielded a beautifully designed, walkable urban environment with a vibrant mix of uses.

# 2 CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE



## Creating a sense of place is critical to generating connection throughout the community and among its residents and visitors.

A connected community fosters social interaction and provides a sense of unity. Creating an authentic sense of place can be achieved by researching the site to uncover interesting historical or contextual details and ultimately creating a thread for design logic. If the site doesn't have a rich history, utilizing the overarching vision for the community can help shape the sense of place while focusing on a mixture of uses for activation. Small details, including material selection, landscape features, colors, and wayfinding elements that tie back to the history of the site or the vision, will all contribute to creating the sense of place.




*PROJECT EXAMPLE*

## NORTH POTOMAC YARD

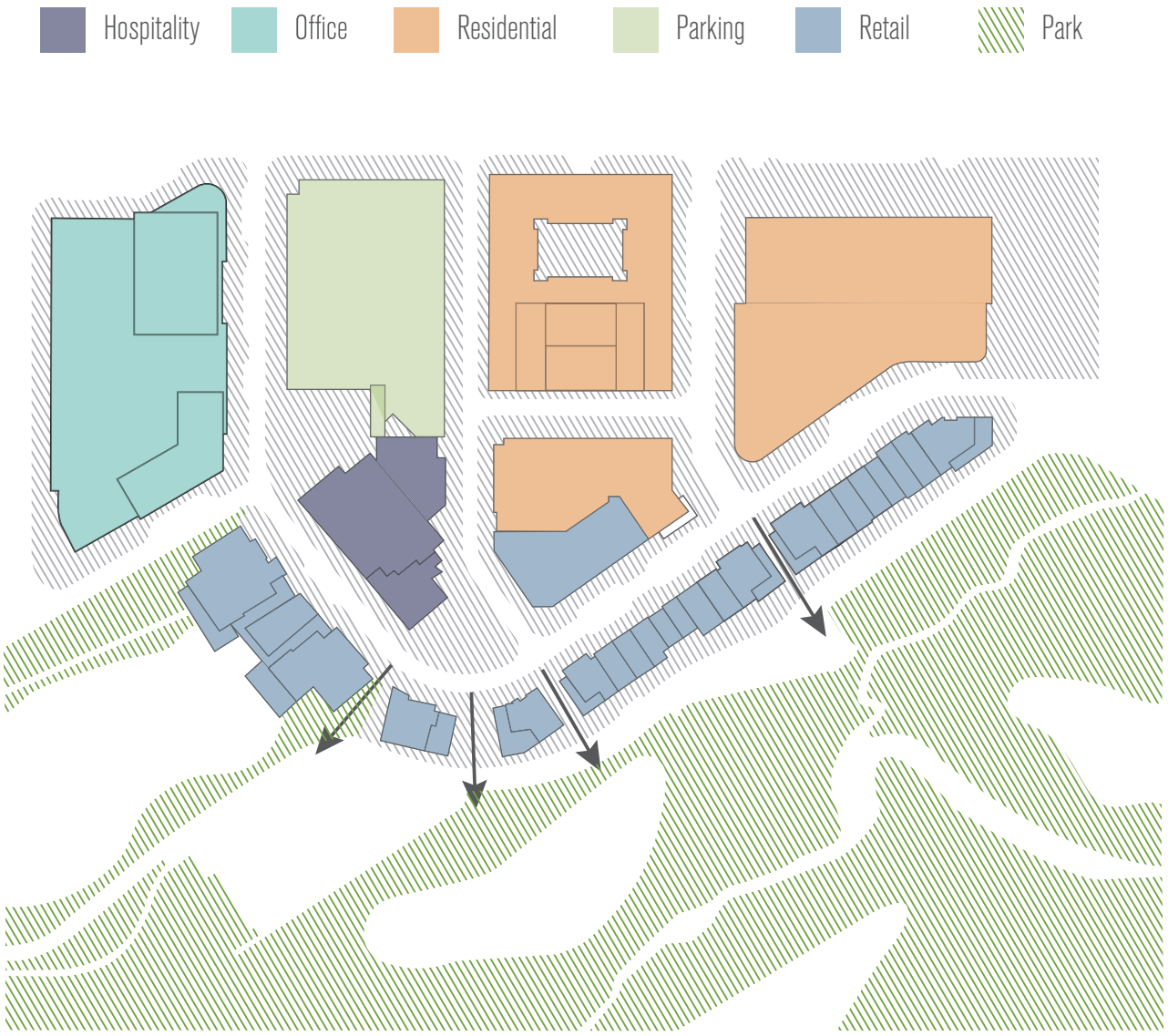
North Potomac Yard (NPY) is a master plan for several underutilized strip retail sites located on U.S. Route 1 just north of Old Town Alexandria, Virginia. NPY is the southernmost neighborhood of the National Landing Community, which also includes Crystal City and Pentagon City. The site's proximity to the heart of Washington, DC, Reagan National Airport, and a new WMATA Metro Station makes it a desirable location to create a dense and thriving new community. The 19-acre Phase I includes the redevelopment of a former movie cinema surrounded by an enormous surface parking lot. The master plan proposes nine new buildings, anchored by the three-building Virginia Tech Innovation Campus to the north and the new metro station to the south. This phase includes 1.6 million square feet of office, hotel, residential, and retail space. HCM designed two mixed-use multifamily buildings for the development, truly creating a place that you can live, work and learn.

# 3 FOCUS ON FLEXIBILITY




## Flexibility is key to a successful development process and any master planned community.

Having a rigid approach to the entitlement, programming, and design process often creates setbacks and can increase the timeline and required investment in the project. Locking into too an overly restrictive framework will impede future flexibility. Instead, consider taking an open approach at the project's onset to explore a variety of block sizes, flexible uses, and adaptability throughout the entitlement process. An initial use should be planned for each block, but the ability to bifurcate and resize the lots as the ultimate uses are determined is critical for success long term. Remember, the first design drawn is typically not what is built.




*PROJECT EXAMPLE*

## FIREFLY PARK

Firefly Park will be a 216-acre master planned community consisting of approximately four million square feet of Class A office space, multiple hospitality sites, 2,200 single-family/multi-family residential units, approximately 350,000 square feet of retail and F&B space, as well as a 40-acre park site. The project is located in Frisco, Texas, at the intersection of the Dallas North Tollway and Highway 380, just north of the new Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) headquarters.

When HCM was engaged on the project, a master plan had already been generated, and the entitlements were about to cross the finish line with the jurisdiction. We were able to engage the entire team and assist with the replanning of Phase 1. The pathways that bifurcated the blocks were reoriented to provide direct line-of-sight to the park beyond, support building servicing, and enhance the retail experience. As a result, the lots were appropriately sized for their planned uses. HCM has continued with the project, providing full design services on two multi-family buildings and design services on 10 retail buildings. The project broke ground on vertical construction in 2025 and is expected to deliver first residential units in 2027.

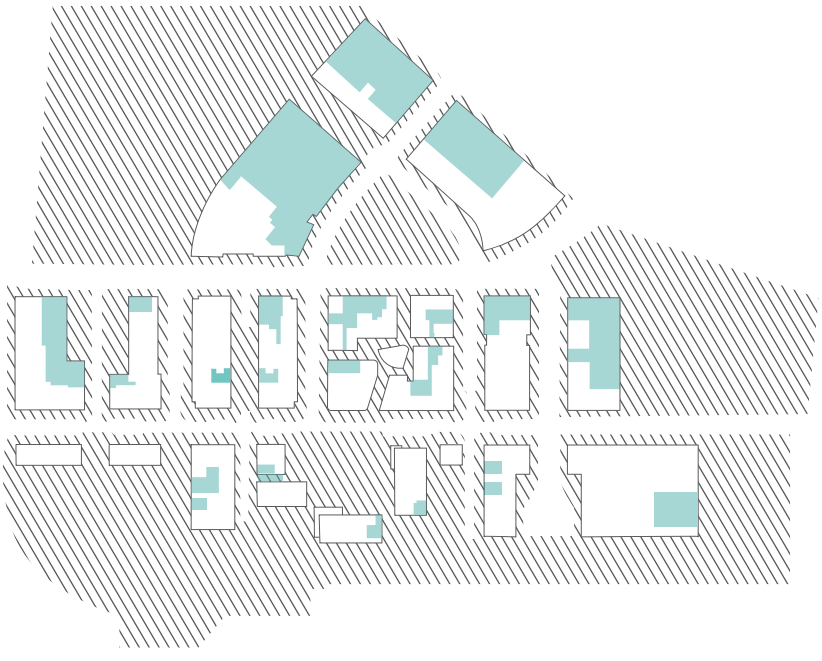
# 4 EMBRACE THE UGLY SIDE



The “ugly” side to an master-planned communities is equally important to creating a beautiful aesthetic.

A vibrant and successful project needs to be functional. Solving the mundane aspects of the MPC is the crucial first step in creating a beautiful place. Early in the design process your team will need to plan for and address critical servicing components such as trash, loading, and utilities. We typically see master plans laid out with four main facades or front doors and not providing for the back of the buildings. Providing a place for these items early in the planning process will elevate the feel of the finished community. HCM has a deep understanding of how streets, blocks, and building functions are critical to the development. This knowledge has led to providing design assistance in the master planning process to review and locate the required items that make our built environment function seamlessly. No one wants their potential resident to walk by the loading dock on the leasing tour or their restaurant patron to be exposed to the smells of the trash holding room.

loading dock, electrical room, trash rooms, etc.

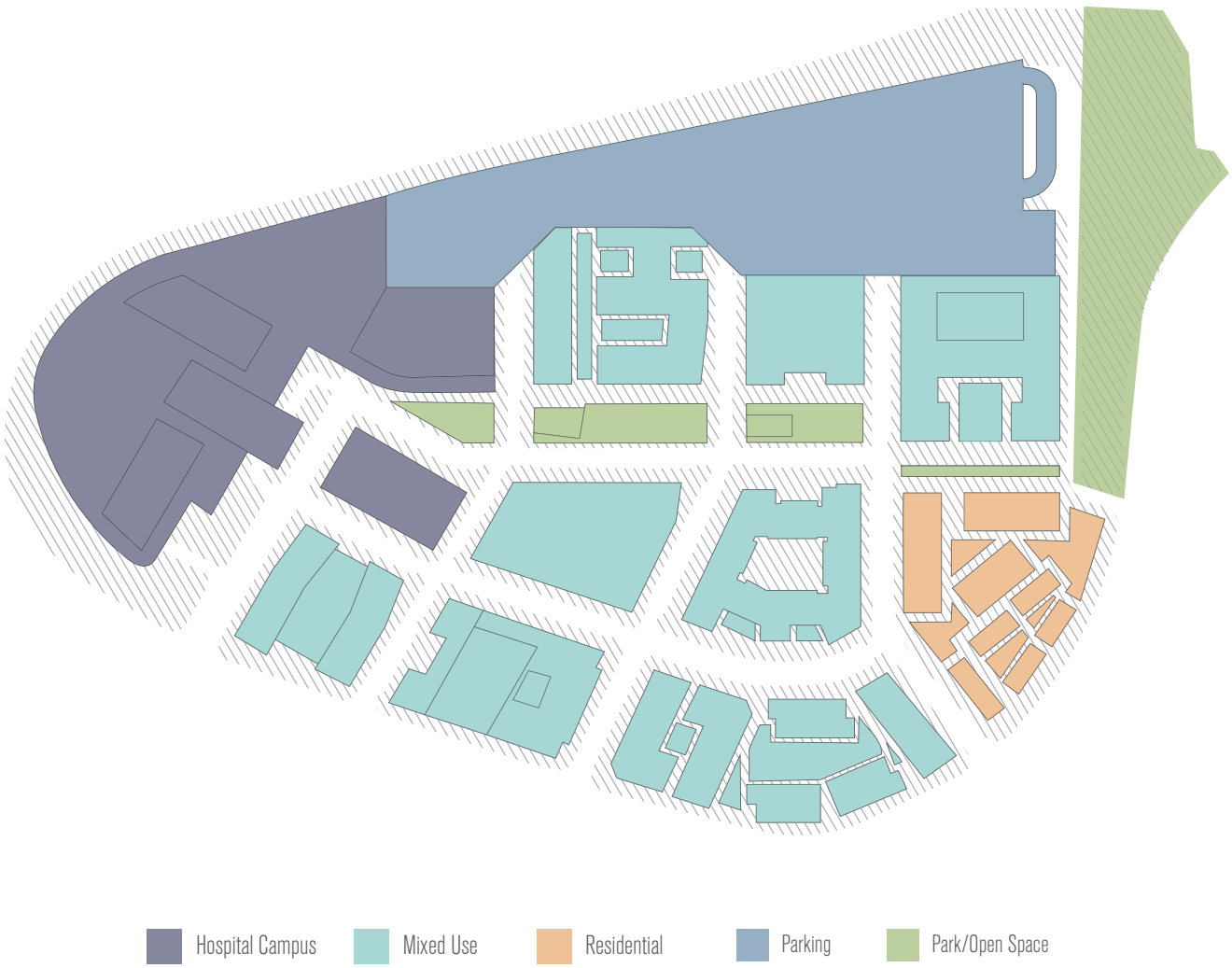


# 5 PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



## Remember that decisions made today will determine what can be developed in the future.

A successful master plan contemplates the ways in which it will expand and evolve over time. Decisions need to be made with future development in mind instead of on a block-by-block basis. Examples of this can be the depth of infrastructure to allow for future connections, maintaining entitlement percentages of uses to allow for occupancy, or constantly adjusting parking ratios as final build-outs are determined.  Also, plan for a variety of uses and distinct spaces so that they work for different user groups and can be adapted to meet future needs. The offerings in each phase should be intentionally differentiated, so that a user is drawn to one offering over another. Decisions made now need to take the future into account.  Piecemeal growth can dilute the success of the whole.




*PROJECT EXAMPLE*

## WEST END

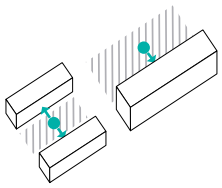
WestEnd is a transformational mixed-use redevelopment within the city of Alexandria, VA. It's large scale is rare within city limits and one that both city officials and developers saw as a significant opportunity. A mix of residential, retail, and entertainment will be offered over a new urban grid of streets organized around an extensive three-block public park known as the Central Plaza. The Inova Health System has also begun the relocation of their Alexandria Hospital to the site to serve as its western anchor and catalyst for future phases. A separate medical office building, a fire station, and a hotel are all clustered adjacent to the new medical campus. The balance of the master plan is filled through a strong mix of proposed housing types. These include new mixed-use multifamily market rate rental, affordable, and assisted living buildings, as well as for-sale townhomes and condos.

The WestEnd development sets a strong vision for the future by meeting the city's growing demand for public services with the new hospital campus, park space, and a regional transit hub. The mix of housing types caters to a range of resident ages and demographics, while supporting the concept of aging in place all alongside a robust offering of community serving retail and open park space right at your doorstep.

# 6 PAY ATTENTION TO PARKING

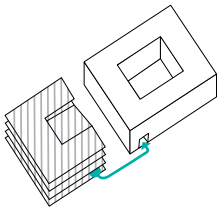
One of the burning questions for all mixed-use projects and master planned communities is: How do we solve for all of the parking requirements?

Depending on your site, you may consider parking by block, remote parking, valet parking, single large parking plinth, or other options. Also, it is best to mix your uses for shared parking to reduce the overall parking spaces required. Office and residential share parking well together as do office and retail. Whatever solution is utilized, the entire patron experience needs to be considered -- from entering the garage, to identifying the correct elevator, to walking to the ultimate destination. Exploring various parking scenarios and including a variety of options will ultimately determine your patrons' experience of the community. Below, we've highlighted a few parking options to consider.



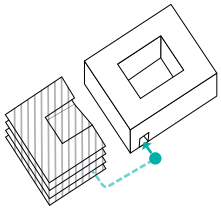
## PARKING BY BLOCK

- Provides immediate access to the uses of that block
- Close proximity for the user
- Requires each block to solve for parking independently
- May not be able to take advantage of shared parking opportunities



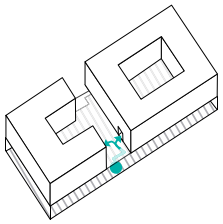
## REMOTE PARKING

- Often, the most cost-effective solution
- Provides large amounts of concentrated parking
- Can maximize shared parking opportunities
- Often removes the patron from the destination
- Has the potential for pedestrian safety concerns if there is not enough activation on the street



## VALET PARKING

- Often works well when paired with remote parking
- Cannot be the only parking solution
- Certain patrons are not comfortable giving their keys away
- Effective for food and beverage offerings
- Provides an elevated hospitality and residential experience



## SINGLE LARGE PARKING PLINTH

- Provides maximum shared parking opportunities
- Allows the user the choice where they access the development
- Pairs very well with a valet solution
- It is often the most expensive solution
- Can require excavation to provide the required amount of parking
- Requires significant structural, plumbing, mechanical, and electrical coordination with the buildings above

# CONCLUSION

Master-planned communities succeed when vision, flexibility, functionality, and long-term thinking are aligned from the outset. The most resilient and vibrant developments are those that establish a clear guiding vision, cultivate an authentic sense of place, and remain adaptable to changing market conditions and community needs. Equally important is addressing the often-overlooked practical realities—such as infrastructure, parking, and servicing—early in the process to ensure the community functions as beautifully as it looks. By planning holistically and intentionally for future phases, developers can avoid fragmented growth and instead deliver cohesive environments that evolve over time. When these principles are applied thoughtfully and collaboratively, master-planned communities have the power to shape not only successful projects, but enduring places that positively influence the built environment for generations to come.

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