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CURTIS + GINSBERG

TOP 10 TRENDS IN MIXED-USE MULTIFAMILY HOUSING

What distinguishes innovative, in-demand mixed-use developments? What do people want when they live, work, and play all in the same building? Here are the top 10 trends in the mixed-use multifamily sector.

10 Mixed-Use Multifamily Trends

1. Breaking the mixed-use mold of residential stacked atop retail
2. Building communities, not just structures
3. Integrating transit options
4. Leveraging public funds to help projects pencil out
5. Finding strategies—from building performance to unit size—to bolster affordability
6. Tending to different demographic demands
7. Focusing on fitness and wellness
8. Designing living spaces to double as workspaces—in units and common areas
9. Taking a holistic approach to security and privacy
10. Converting offices to residential

BY NOVID PARSI, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

While office vacancy rates have climbed since the pandemic—peaking at an estimated 24% by 2026, according to Moody's—mixed-use markets have seen more resilient demand. Mixed-use environments, according to JLL, have been flourishing. "Activity levels in areas with a more diverse distribution of property types among commercial, residential, and entertainment uses have recovered more quickly than commercially dominated cores," JLL writes.

What distinguishes innovative, in-demand mixed-use developments? What do people want when they live, work, and play all in the same building? Here are the top 10 trends in the mixed-use multifamily sector.

1. BREAKING THE MIXED-USE MOLD OF RESIDENTIAL STACKED ATOP RETAIL

Traditionally, mixed-use buildings place several residential floors on top of ground-floor retail. Today, developers and builders are diverging from that template. They're placing amenities, as well as communal and commercial spaces, throughout the building, not just on the ground floor. "We're seeing amenities spread throughout the buildings, instead of all sequestered on the first floor," says Kurt Volkman, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, Associate Principal and Sector Leader with HED.

More so than in years past, some active-adult projects, for example, now include a common room on each floor, encouraging residents to interact. These areas might serve as makerspaces or game rooms. "Having common rooms open to everyone on every floor allows a greater sense of a small community at a floor-to-floor level," Volkman says.

"With the growing diversity in demographics, income levels, and family composition, there's a clear shift toward offering a broader range of amenities and experiences beyond the residential units. This trend often means providing amenity-like retail as well as retail-like amenities and distributing them more creatively throughout a building to cater to different needs," says Frank André, Principal, Hord Coplan Macht.

For Colorado's Westminster Row, with 274 apartments and 16,000 sf of retail, Hord Coplan Macht placed an intimate clubroom on the top floor along with a small outdoor terrace, offering views of the Front Range mountains near Denver.

Designed by Curtis + Ginsberg, The Seneca in New York City, a 105-unit affordable housing development, will feature a midfloor of residential amenities and terrace space. The ninth-floor setback will provide a public loggia with amenities and a shared outdoor terrace overlooking Central Park. Instead of retail, the ground floor will integrate nonprofit offices and programming space.

The trend applies to commercial spaces, too. "We're seeing some projects incorporate office into multifamily," says Douglas Webster, AIA, NCARB, Fitwel Amb., Associate Principal and Director of Design with Cooper Carry. The Cooper Carry-designed, 31-story Society Atlanta situates—from the ground up—retail, parking, office space, an amenity level with a rooftop pool, and then 23 levels with 460 apartments.

2. BUILDING COMMUNITIES, NOT JUST STRUCTURES

With mixed-use multifamily projects, design firms recognize they're doing more than creating stand-alone structures—they're also helping to form cohesive communities. "Placemaking has become central to our work, with new communities often built around a mix of residential, retail, office, and hotel uses, complemented by large-scale parks and exterior environments," says Jennifer Harpe, NCIDQ, CID, Principal, Hord Coplan Macht. Incorporating nonprofit and maker spaces and other amenities also helps "round out a holistic environment," says R. Darby Curtis, AIA, Managing Partner, Curtis + Ginsberg Architects.

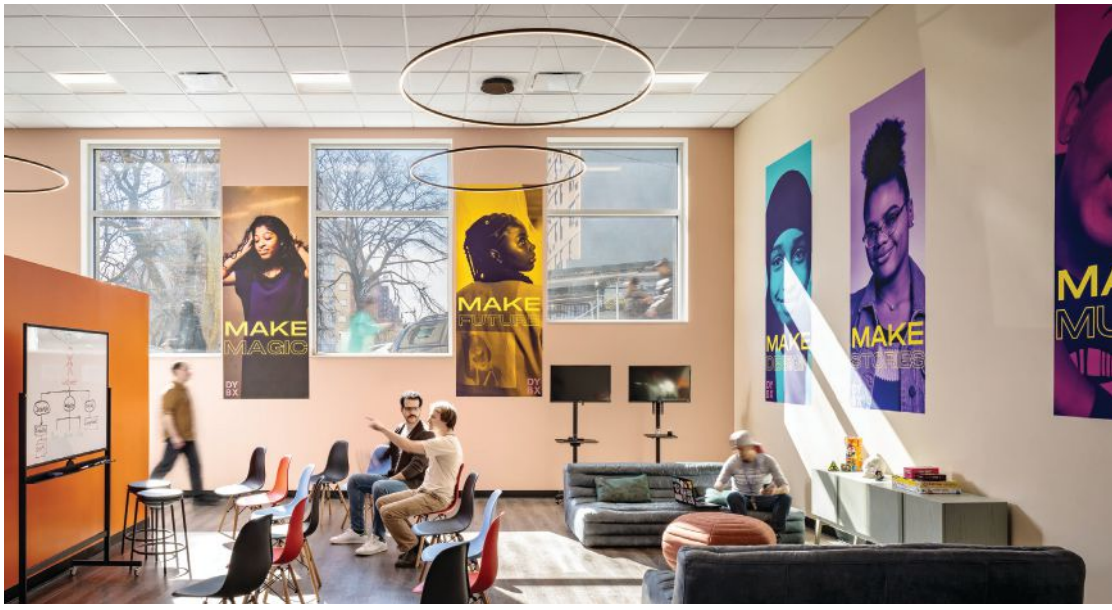
For Landmark Block K, located in Alexandria, Va., a three-block central plaza serves as the development's organizing open space and public amenity, connecting the 337 residences on one side with a hospital on the other. "Every element contributes to creating a cohesive and vibrant community," Harpe says.

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A sense of community can be created by locating projects beside parks and other outdoor facilities. For instance, Modera Parkside, which Gresham Smith designed for Mill Creek Residential, is a 32-story, 361-apartment mixed-use tower bordering Piedmont Park in Atlanta. Large balconies offer views of the park.

GRESHAM SMITH





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Some mixed-use buildings go beyond "transit oriented" and physically integrate with transit options. For example, Melrose North in New York City, designed by Curtis + Ginsberg, provides an accessible ramp to the neighboring Melrose Station.

Gresham Smith designed for Mill Creek Residential, is a 32-story, 361-apartment mixed-use tower bordering Piedmont Park in Atlanta. Large balconies offer views of the park, "promoting social interaction and enabling tenants to better acquaint themselves with their immediate neighbors," says Brandon Bell, AIA, Principal, Residential Practice Leader, Gresham Smith. Similarly, The Sinclair, a mixed-use, 27-story tower that Gresham Smith designed for GBT Realty, connects to Nashville's Centennial Park.

3. INTEGRATING TRANSIT OPTIONS

Mixed-used projects are increasingly being placed close to transit options. "We're seeing more transit-oriented developments getting people out of their cars and bringing them closer to transit and employment opportunities," Volkman says.

This trend places an "increased emphasis on the site design around transit stations, which provide interesting and inviting amenities while gracefully and safely managing pedestrian and cyclist traffic," says Monica Robertson, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, CGP, Principal, Hord Coplan Macht. Such site amenities can include plazas with seating, shade structures, public art, interactive fountains, and bike-share stations.

Some mixed-use buildings go beyond "transit oriented" and physically integrate with transit options. "We are seeing interest in not merely planning and building adjacent to transit but to design more intertwined and integrated configurations," says Toby Snyder, AIA, LEED, Senior Associate, FXCollaborative.

In Aurora, Colo., Tempo Nine Mile, a five-story, 255-unit mixed-use development, is expected to get a pedestrian bridge connecting it to the light rail Nine Mile Station. In New York City, two Curtis + Ginsberg-designed projects exemplify this trend: Melrose North provides an accessible ramp to the neighboring Melrose Station, while 4697 Third Avenue extends the retail corridor around the Fordham transit center. "In each case the development contributes to a denser, pedestrian-friendly, and connected community," says Mark Ginsberg, FAIA, LEED AP, Partner, Curtis + Ginsberg.

Transit options aren't limited to mass transit. Some projects support micromobility by providing space and infrastructure for both privately and publicly owned bicycles, e-bicycles, and scooters. "This trend is also bolstering the viability of the 15-minute city concept—that most daily needs should be within 15 minutes of where you live," FXCollaborative's Snyder says.

The transit trend is partly fueled by jurisdictions reducing the number of required parking spaces for urban, transit-oriented developments—resulting not only in higher mass transit use but also reduced construction costs and potentially more affordable housing. "Spending less money to build parking frees up the budget, which, in turn, can be invested in the development of housing," Hord Coplan Macht's Robertson says.

4. LEVERAGING PUBLIC FUNDS TO HELP PROJECTS PENCIL OUT

Faced with greater difficulty financing market-rate projects in today's climate, some developers are finding greater ease financing affordable housing.

"Affordable housing right now is one of the easier methods of financing a project," Volkman says. "We went through a period of a lot of market-rate and upper-market-rate construction, and that

left a deficit in affordable and workforce housing. We're seeing a lot of developers take up the charge of affordable housing and working with local, state, and federal governments to fund it."

Curtis + Ginsberg has leveraged city and state programs to help fund renovations and energy upgrades at public housing campuses across New York City. These include 819 Grand, a 14-story, 220-unit affordable senior housing project with ground-floor commercial space in Brooklyn; HELP ONE, a four-building mixed-use complex in Brooklyn; and Park Avenue Green, a 15-story, 154-unit passive house project in the Bronx.

In downtown San Francisco, Swinerton is working on a transit-oriented, affordable housing development with senior and family housing, as well as retail and childcare facilities. The project benefits from a California program that permits affordable housing projects to offer more units than local zoning allows. "This allowed the project to be taller with more units, allowing the development team to maximize the amount of housing on the site and get a better cost per unit," says Patrick Otellini, National Affordable Housing Director, Swinerton.

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One financing approach involves partnering with a local government to fund public parking within a private multifamily project. That's what developer Mariner Group did at Riverworks in Savannah, Ga., says Maggie Ward, AIA, Associate Principal, Cooper Carry. The parking garage includes about 700 public spaces and 400 spaces for apartment residents, and the city paid for the deck's foundations and concrete cap, Ward says.

5. FINDING STRATEGIES TO BOLSTER AFFORDABILITY

Mixed-use projects are focusing on building performance to improve the residential experience—but also to drive affordability. "We're seeing a lot more focus, especially in affordable housing, on building performance overall," Volkman says. The 43-unit, transit-oriented Conservatory Apartments will be the largest multifamily building in Chicago to meet passive house standards and achieve Phius certification, HED says.

Building performance standards, such as Phius for passive house and the WELL Building Standard, "ensure sustainable development that cuts cost long-term," Curtis + Ginsberg's Ginsberg says.

Curtis + Ginsberg has completed 25 large-scale passive house projects, with five more in design and construction. The firm achieves sustainability and resilience via myriad performance strategies, such as all-electric design; prefab panels; large solar PV arrays; and ground-source heat pumps for heating, cooling, and water. The firm's affordable housing project Melrose North, in the Bronx, N.Y., has been designed to passive house standards.

An emphasis on performance and efficiency in affordable mixed-use projects has an added benefit, Volkman says: "Developers and building owners typically hold affordable projects longer than market-rate projects," so they're directly affected by the building's energy performance and cost.

Mass timber is another building performance strategy gaining traction. "More and more, we are seeing our housing clients opt for mass timber structures," Swinerton's Otellini says. "It provides a rich biophilic experience for residents with the added benefit of being one of the most sustainable ways to build." Swinerton's 126-unit Heartwood project, which provides workforce housing along with retail in Seattle, is a hybrid mass timber and steel structure. Removing the steel from the column-to-beam connections cut an estimated 11% from the structural budget.

Projects also are driving affordability by offering smaller units. "Micro units appear to be a growing trend, given their more attainable price points," says Alysha Buck, AIA, Associate Principal, Cooper Carry. In Arlington, Va., The Commodore has micro units as small as 333 sf. In 25 of The Commodore's 423 units, Cooper Carry implemented robotic furniture components from Ori Expandable Apartments "to allow for maximum functionality in small spaces," Buck says. These components include moveable closets as well as beds that come down from the ceiling and then go back up to reveal sofas and coffee tables underneath.

Some developers are offering a greater mix of unit types and sizes within the same development. Hord Coplan Macht is seeing more projects provide affordable units in addition to a small number of luxury units. "This approach allows developers to cater to a high-income segment while still offering a range of more affordable units within the same building," André says. "The inclusion of everything



SWINERTON

In Charlotte, N.C., Swinerton is currently building a $97.8 million mixed-use building that brings 389 residential apartment units over 14,300 sf of office and retail space. Oxbox is the third project that Swinerton has done with developer Space Craft. The locations are known for their integration within walkable, urban communities and sustainable features. Oxbow incorporates a hybrid mass timber structure with cross-laminated timber.



HORD COPLAN MACHT

Communal areas now boast flex work-life spaces, such as two-person pods and banquette niches. For instance, Matson Mill's three-story lobby provides a variety of work-from-home and meeting spaces, including a large work table with tabletop outlets. The Conshohocken, Pa., project was designed by Hord Coplan Macht.

from micro units to large three-bedroom apartments provides flexibility for residents and allows developers to attract a wider range of tenants, from single professionals to families."

6. TENDING TO DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHIC DEMANDS

As Baby Boomers launch the largest wave of retirements in U.S. history, and Gen Xers soon enter their retirement years, many of these individuals aren't moving into traditional senior housing facilities. Instead, they seek mixed-use developments with active-adult living options. "The 55+ target is downsizing from single-family homes in favor of amenity-rich multifamily environments," Hord Coplan Macht's Harpe says.

Some of these projects aren't entirely age exclusive. Instead, they integrate traditional market-rate multifamily units with age-restricted units—all sharing amenities such as event dining, speaker series, and game rooms.

This trend can be particularly attractive for developers, as active-adult communities can see higher retention rates than market-rate projects, according to Volkman. Residents tend to live in these developments for many years, especially when they're part of larger continuing care communities that also provide health services.

The mixed-use multifamily sector also is targeting the family demographic, with play areas, outdoor spaces, and units with multiple bedrooms.

7. FOCUSING ON FITNESS AND WELLNESS

These days, the heightened emphasis on fitness and wellness goes well beyond standard offerings such as swimming pools to include more distinctive offerings ranging from bowling alleys to pickleball courts. There are buildings with ski shops, bike shops, and golf simulators—as well as multipurpose spaces that can serve, for example, as yoga rooms or physical therapy rooms at different times of the day.

"Health and wellness amenities are currently the most requested elements," says Harpe of Hord Coplan Macht. These amenities run the gamut from onsite saunas and steam rooms to cold plunge pools, treatment rooms, and spas. "These spaces are becoming more boutique and niche," Harpe says.

Cooper Carry-designed projects, such as Solis Midtown in Charlotte, N.C., offer a robust range of wellness amenities that can include yoga rooms, spas, wet/dry saunas, massage areas, and cold plunge pools. "We're seeing more of an emphasis on wellness," says Ali Gagliardo, RID, MBA, IIDA, Associate Principal with Cooper Carry.

8. DESIGNING LIVING SPACES TO DOUBLE AS WORKSPACES—IN UNITS AND COMMON AREAS

As hybrid has become the most common work arrangement, mixed-use multifamily projects are increasingly catering to the new work-from-home reality. "With remote and flex work here to stay, every space has the potential to be used for working and, more importantly, will be used for working," says Hord Coplan Macht's Harpe.

Communal areas now boast flex work-life spaces, such as two-person pods and banquette niches. A couple of Hord Coplan Macht projects illustrate this trend: The Marlow's (Columbia, Md.) common amenity areas feature private spaces where residents can work, and Matson Mill's (Conshohocken, Pa.) three-story lobby provides a variety of work-

from-home and meeting spaces, including a large work table with tabletop outlets.

The flex-space trend applies to individual units as well. "The inclusion of home office or plus rooms can enable more flexible ways for folks to start a family or work from home," says FXCollaborative's Snyder, adding that mixed-use buildings can create these in-unit flex spaces by offering more storage spaces in the building and less closet space inside each apartment.

"Co-working spaces combining open-concept areas and private meeting rooms with state-of-the-art tech enable a communal work-from-home environment, which continues to evolve," says Curtis + Ginsberg's Curtis.

9. TAKING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SECURITY AND PRIVACY

In mixed-use multifamily developments, security encompasses far more than keycards. Secure entry systems with keycard or app access are just the necessary start. Developers and designers have to think of the entire facility holistically—considering, for example, where residents park, where they access public transit, how they approach the building, and where they get their mail. Project leaders have to consider how long each journey takes and the physical barriers surrounding residents on each one—and then provide more barriers, security cameras, and lighting as needed. "Our design approach strives to incorporate multiple points of public visibility in common areas," says Gresham Smith's Bell.

Some mixed-used buildings separate the secure, internal residential lobbies from the public lobbies used for commercial spaces. Some might offer dedicated spaces for package deliveries. Such security strategies "go a long way to maintaining privacy and security," Curtis + Ginsberg's Curtis says.

In its urban mixed-use projects, FXCollaborative enhances security by providing the different uses with separate entrances, lobbies, and vertical circulation cores. "This makes the layout of the ground floor critical but becomes a design opportunity. We look at how each entrance can maintain pride of place and create a feeling that one is entering a distinct building with its own identity," says FXCollaborative's Snyder.

Tech certainly plays a role, such as with access control systems. But so do physical security measures, such as door armor like latch guards or ground-level units with half-glass front doors instead of full glass.

10. CONVERTING OFFICES TO RESIDENTIAL

Developers are turning office buildings, where vacancies now run at an all-time high, into mixed-use residences. About 151,000 rental apartments are being converted from other uses, with about 58,000 of them repurposed from former office spaces.

Such conversions can significantly increase the speed to market—"since so much of the time and cost of larger projects is in the foundation and structure," Snyder says. Conversions also can deliver both housing and sustainability benefits, Snyder adds. "Converting existing office buildings to residential or other uses significantly reduces carbon compared to new construction and addresses critical shortfalls in cities' housing needs," he says. In New York, FXCollaborative is currently working with Sunlight Development to convert the office buildings of the landmarked 95 Madison Ave into residential units.

Another advantage of converting office or commercial buildings to mixed-use spaces: "They already have a built-in IT infrastructure," says Curtis + Ginsberg's Ginsberg.+

The common amenity areas at The Marlow, Columbia, Md., feature private spaces where residents can work. The project was designed by Hord Coplan Macht.



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