


Multi-Housing

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Blended living

How Avalon Sudbury is changing the game for multi-family communities



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Elevating where you live is about blending it seamlessly with how you live. If the Avalon Sudbury community in Sudbury, Massachusetts had a mantra, that would be the one. By going to great lengths to design amenities and choosing locations that put everything within everyone's reach, Avalon Sudbury is the place to be.

Offering one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments and townhomes in a pet-friendly and smoke-free community, every apartment home is part of its Signature Collection. You want stunning, check out its modern kitchens with stainless steel appliances, quartz stone countertops and glass tile backsplash.

To get a look at Avalon Sudbury, we sat down with Edward R. Bradford, AIA NCARB, LEED AP, Principal for The Architectural Team (TAT), which helped design the community.

Give us a snapshot of the AvalonBay brand

AvalonBay Communities is one of the country's largest and most influential developers and owner/operators of multifamily rental properties. The firm has a longstanding relationship with AvalonBay, and in addition to planning and designing dozens of its properties across New England and the

New York metro area, we also have helped develop several of its prototype unit layouts, which shape its national portfolio. This client service relationship has been at the core of TAT's practice for 50 years. Our goal is to help create transformational housing that is more livable, exciting and sustainable.

What type of consumers is AvalonBay targeting?

Our collaborations with AvalonBay target sophisticated, design-savvy residents who want to live in fresh and exciting communities, but also contextual to its location. This is a strong psychographic profile that extends across many demographic groups. For example, many of our AvalonBay projects are mixed-income properties, and offer a wide range of unit types and sizes. This reflects the wide appeal that well-planned, well-located multifamily communities can command in the current market.

How does the overall community design cater to what today's consumers want?

Today's multifamily consumers have high standards, and rightfully so. They are looking for efficient, functional, and well-designed units that prioritize sustainability and wellness. Consumers also are looking for properties that support hybrid work and other evolving lifestyle needs with advanced technology infrastructure, work pods and touchdown spaces that connect to a broader social and urban experience. A strong amenity and service package is important, too. In today's market, this extends from dedicated pet amenities, to well-designed and secure mailrooms, and package drop-off spaces.

Avalon Sudbury directly addresses this by offering 250 mixed-income apartment homes across a series of 31 residential scaled two- and three-story buildings, including townhomes and a unique eight and 10-unit "direct-entry" building type that incorporates a private entry, garage and generous balcony space for every unit.

All of these buildings are oriented around a central clubhouse that offers a focal point for socialization and engagement. Our master plan for the development includes a substantial amount of outdoor amenity space, which has proven to be a critical element for multifamily properties in the past year.

From an architectural perspective, Avalon Sudbury is informed by classic vernacular New England style but draws on this design influence in contemporary ways with an overall focus on creating a community feel. This can be seen in Meadow Walk Sudbury, a larger 50-acre mixed-use community located on a former research campus less than 30 miles from Boston. The result is a town "hub."

What adjustments have you made to your business model during the recent state of events?

COVID-19 had an impact at a project level. The pandemic brought challenges ranging from supply chain issues to project delays and shutdowns.

On a more positive note, we have seen a greater focus on issues that we've taken seriously for a long time—such as creating healthy and sustainable designs for diverse building types. More developers are placing an emphasis on better access to light and air, biophilic interiors, advanced mechanical and filtration systems, and similar elements that improve quality of life for residents in any context.

Give us a snapshot of today's multifamily market.

Most fundamentally, there simply is a need for more multifamily housing, across regional markets and across income levels. This certainly is a challenge, but we also see creative solutions emerging that will help address these housing shortages in compelling ways.

TAT just completed a large-scale project in Boston called Bower, which redeveloped a series of parking lots and other underutilized plots of city owned land into hundreds of units of new housing, along with improved transit connections and public open space. This is just one example of how the design and development communities are creating new value.

We currently are involved in several mixed-use and housing initiatives that will help transform cities with vibrant, 24/7 activity and thoughtfully designed public realms that reconnect multiple neighborhoods. These projects are emblematic of some of today's most significant planning and urban design trends. They are walkable and offer access to transit. They incorporate biophilic design elements and pursue cutting-edge certifications like Fitwel. And they place a strong emphasis on contextual design and a positive contribution to the larger city fabric.

What's likely to happen next?

The crucial role of resilient, energy efficient, and affordable housing will become even more apparent in coming years. From our position, we ultimately see a growth trajectory for sustainable and accessible infill,



transit-oriented developments, well-planned workforce and affordable housing, a continuation of historic adaptive reuse, and other inventive multifamily design solutions that overcome unique and complex challenges.

What trends are defining the space?

Today's best multifamily projects are defined by a deeply researched focus on resident needs. An inviting public realm and proximity to public transit is key in the current market, as are mixed-use spaces on the ground floor that can activate the surrounding streetscape.

Other important elements include well-designed units, private and public outdoor space and amenities that can facilitate wellness—such as fitness centers, yoga rooms, and bike storage and repair rooms. Healthy materials are becoming more popular, and maker spaces and other opportunities for creative engagement are also more important than ever before.

There also is a significant emphasis on supporting a sense of community, connection and engagement between residents of a given property.

What's your short-term strategy? Long-term?

In the near term, we're excited to continue project work in our firm's core sectors, which include ground-up multifamily developments (market-rate, affordable, and mixed-income), historic adaptive reuse initiatives, large-scale mixed-use complexes, senior and assisted living communities, and urban waterfront developments.

We also have a strong pipeline of hospitality projects, and are thrilled to leverage our multifamily experience into the student housing market. Looking down the road, waterfront development with a strong resiliency component is an area we feel will become more important in coastal communities around the country.

Smart design solutions such as living shorelines, which our firm incorporated at the Clippership Wharf project in East Boston,



will be critical moving forward. We're also exploring a number of innovative and highly sustainable building practices for a wide range of projects, including Passive House for affordable housing and adaptive reuse.

What's the most defining part of the units/location?

Avalon Sudbury is defined by its walkable community feel, and also by the diversity of building and unit types. Unit entry doors and front porches line new streets, contributing to the neighborhood's walkability and character, while most garages are discreetly located to the rear of buildings. Residents can choose the kind of unit that actually serves their needs; this is an approach we bring to all our projects, but it's still relatively rare.

The direct-entry buildings provide a unique assortment of units, not often provided in one building type. One-, two- and three-bedroom flats are located at the first floor, with multi-story units, many with lofts and dens, located above. A distinct set of smaller town-home buildings compliment the direct-entry buildings with larger two- and three-bedroom

unit types. This is a kind of comprehensive planning that isn't found in many other developments within the same region.

Walk us through how and why Avalon Sudbury is designed the way it is?

Our design approach grew out of a holistic focus on resident experience. This is a large development, but we know how important it is for many residents to live in a setting with a neighborhood feel, so we designed a sidewalk and street network, siting the buildings and setting their massing, all with an eye toward forming a comfortable residential scale. Avalon Sudbury really feels like a town, and it is a significantly more approachable plan than one might expect for a 250-unit development.

Take us through your construction and design strategy.

As with all of TAT's work with AvalonBay, this project aims to offer a strong array of unit types that are most desired in the current market. The residences range in size from

one- to three-bedroom units, and they all feature upscale and contemporary finishes that today's residents seek out—including modern kitchens with stainless steel appliances, quartz stone countertops and glass tile backsplash.

A community's amenity package also is critical in attracting residents, so we set a program that includes an outdoor swimming pool, landscaped courtyards with fire pits and gas grills, a work center with various table options and custom knotted wool carpet, and a fitness center and yoga room located in the large central clubhouse structure.



Crucially in the current market, the clubhouse's design reflects an understanding that today's amenities are about work as much as play—the communal spaces are fully connected with WiFi and dedicated computer hook-ups. Multiple types of seating options offer a dedicated space for residents who freelance or work from home, serving as an extension of the living space.

What's the biggest issue related to the construction side of the business?

Supply chains are a challenge at the moment. Overseas material sourcing and closed borders

have created long-term effects on construction schedules and costs. These impacts will have a long tail, but we do see movement trending back towards pre-pandemic levels.

Talk about sustainability.

Sustainability is an important focus for us. Our approach is holistic. We are always exploring innovative building practices that enhance the sustainability of our projects. We currently have a number of Passive House developments underway, including for senior and affordable housing—two sectors

where this rigorous building approach has not been utilized enough in the past.

We're also involved in several forward-looking adaptive reuse projects that move towards decarbonization, for instance by utilizing geothermal power. This is quite rare for a historic retrofit project, but we anticipate it will become an important trend. It is worth noting also that adaptive reuse, which is a longstanding specialty of our firm, is an inherently sustainable approach, especially now that the building industry thinks more carefully about embodied carbon. It is likely retrofits and adaptive reuse initiatives will become even more popular.

What type of opportunities do you see moving ahead?

In the multifamily sector, there are lots of opportunities to add more housing through creative infill development, repositioning and adaptive reuse, and the redevelopment of sites like the large underutilized property that now is home to Avalon Sudbury.

Similarly, our firm has always prioritized transit-oriented development (TOD) and we help our clients site projects to take advantage of transit networks (and sometimes even contribute to them, through the creation of bus stops or connections to rail stations); now, even in smaller cities we are seeing interest in this approach, which will help to make these communities more livable and sustainable.

There also are many exciting opportunities to blend green building strategies such as Passive House with the expansion of affordable and workforce housing options.

What is the secret to creating a “must live in” community today?

In order to create a successful multifamily community, architects, developers, and owner/operators must understand—and design for—what residents want and need. This means functional and efficient units that support wellness with natural light and air, a design approach that makes a compelling architectural statement, a flexible amenity package that embraces current modes of hybrid working, and a focus on a strong urban design scheme and master plan that respects neighborhood context and fosters a sense of community and connection.

This final point really is about place-making and the creation of a memorable experience, which is one of our firm's core tenets and is central to our approach. By integrating art, landscape, architecture and interior design into a holistic and uplifting experience, we can ensure that a multifamily property captures and holds a consumer's attention as a place they'd like to call home. **MH**