



Expert's Corner ~

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Homes Created to Enhance Your Lifestyle The Benefits of Mixed Use Developments

While there are many projects currently using the “mixed use” phrase, the concept is still in its infancy stage in the development community and it therefore wouldn’t be fair to call anyone an expert yet. Nonetheless, it is a trend that is here to stay.

Mixed use refers to the combining, or “clustering,” of commercial uses (retail, office, service uses) with a residential or civic component, all located in the same building or on the same site. The purpose? To incorporate a mixture of different uses in very close proximity, thereby creating a community where people can live and walk to restaurants, shopping, sundries or entertainment. Many mixed use projects use the marketing phrase “Live, Work and Play” to represent the full array of lifestyle choices available at these developments.

The benefit to the consumer is a unique opportunity to live in or travel to a location

with easy pedestrian access to multiple uses that enhance or support a desirable lifestyle – an automobile is no longer a necessity of their daily routine. To a municipally, mixed use mitigates traffic congestion and sprawl, and creates multiple tax revenue opportunities on a smaller property when developable property is at a premium. To a developer, mixed use provides an opportunity to create a unique showcase development that provides for multiple uses to share in the ever-increasing land cost burden. It also mitigates the development risk of relying on any one single use.

Take the new Harbor Heights development in Norfolk as an example. This project provides 99 luxury condominiums and lofts located on floors 7 through 15 of a high-rise structure that also provides for 70,000 square feet of office and a 40,000 square foot urban gourmet market. It’s the first of its kind in

downtown Norfolk. Residents of the luxury units will have the gourmet market to fulfill all of their daily grocery shopping needs, with an onsite chef and ‘prepared to order’ service. Yet because of the vertical separation, it will seem a world away. Within a one to five minute walk, there is access to the waterfront, businesses, MacArthur Center, theatre, sports and restaurants, all of which provide a fully-rounded and vibrant lifestyle.

Mixed use projects don’t always come in ‘vertical structures’ (high-rises). Many successful developments are ‘horizontal mixed use,’ generally in two forms: (1) a single structure, generally low-rise, in a suburban location, which provides retail/commercial or service use in the portion fronting the public streets with residential uses behind or (2) two or more structures on one site that provide retail or service uses in the structure fronting public streets and residential or

office uses in separate structures located behind or to the side.

What is the future for mixed use? Given that this trend is still somewhat new, until there are sustainable demographics on how successful these developments are (and what makes them successful), we will continue to see more of these projects surface in similar form to the ones that exist today. It’s the herd mentality.

Over the next 5 years, the concept will continue to develop. Cities will encourage public-private partnerships as a way to continue building density within their downtowns and you’ll continue to see developers distinguish their projects by bringing a “use” not provided by their competitors. The end result will give consumers multiple opportunities to choose the development that provides the best mixture of uses for their lifestyle.