

Buchanan Park

The Case Study

This case study will focus on a unique residential development that showcases different urban housing opportunities from townhomes to condominiums in an historic school. Located on the corner of 13th and D Streets, the Buchanan Park property has a long history. It was originally developed with four buildings (two school buildings, an interstitial building, and an auditorium) built between 1895 and the 1930's and served elementary-aged students until it closed in 1993. Insight Property Group developed the property in two phases. The two school buildings were combined and converted to 41 condominiums, developed by Ditto Residential. A new main entrance and elevator were added to the school building. The condominiums preserved unique elements of the school building such as white oak custom millwork and exposed brick walls while providing modern finishes and amenities.

The remainder of the site yielded a total of 41 townhomes with a mix of widths and parking arrangements. They were built around landscaped interior spaces with an alleyway between the townhouses. Insight petitioned and received relief from the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) in four areas to achieve the mix of units on the site. There are 32 three-bedroom homes and nine four-bedroom homes with elevators. The emphasis of the development was to create new townhouse product that was designed in keeping with the historic architecture of Capitol Hill.

The Development Challenges

- Deciding what type of residential unit to construct
- Designing the right product and parcel mix without opening up the PUD process and creating additional risk
- Setting the price point for the units based on cost environment
- Getting caught up in pop-up legislation moving through the City Council
- Coordinating all master site and utility work between two different developers and general contractors and phases, on different schedules
- Combining two historic structures on the site into one building by razing an interstitial structure and replacing it with a new entryway and elevators
- Carving out unit sizes in the school building ranging from studios to three-bedroom apartments to provide options for singles as well as larger families.

What You Will Learn

- Why this site was of interest to the developer
- What was the basis for the developer's choice to build townhouses when apartments and condominiums surround the site

- How decisions were made for construction of new products nearby by the same two developers
- The role of the ANC in the development process
- What variances were required to allow the townhouses to be built according to the plan
- The process to create new condominiums from a previous school building with “good bones”

Speakers:

Martin Ditto, CEO, Ditto

Callie Bruemmer, Director of Marketing, Ditto

Trent Smith, Partner, Insight Property Group

Location: The Buchanan School: 1324 E Street SE Washington, DC 20003—closest metro is Potomac Avenue. Street parking.