

march-april 2021 // retrofitmagazine.com

retrofit

*** Artscape:** A Romanesque Revival-style Church Is Reimagined for the SoMa Arts Scene
+ **More Religious Facilities**



*** TREND ALERT:**
humanitarian
design

RISING

WRITTEN BY | STEVE SMITH, AIA

The new occupants of 2470 Man-deville Lane in Alexandria, Va., are no longer suited government employees working in cubicles. Once serving as the home to the U.S. Department of Defense, the 741,000-square-foot office building has been converted into The Foundry, a residential tower comprising 520 units and 25,000 square feet of retail space and parking. Designed by Cooper Carry, in partnership with Perseus TDC, the office-to-residential transformation is not only the largest adaptive-reuse project of its kind in the mid-Atlantic region, but also a harbinger of a rising trend among developers in the D.C. region and beyond to reimagine old structures—particularly former offices—for innovative use.

A housing shortage has gripped the Washington, D.C., area, giving rise to skyrocketing rents and home prices. In 2019, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments anticipated the area needs 320,000 new units, primarily affordable, by 2030 to keep up with booming business, as well as a 20 percent reduction in traffic congestion if the majority of the new housing is near transit hubs.

Now, as more employees become accustomed to working from home during our current pandemic, there's a strong likelihood many corporations will continue to gravitate toward modernized, healthier offices that serve smaller groups of revolving workers in the future, negating the need for the overabundance of lower-end workspaces that currently exist in urban cores. Conflating the urgent demand for housing with increased office vacancies, we can expect to see more opportunities for office-to-multifamily conversions.

The Foundry is one solution to narrowing the area's housing gap, introducing a mix of studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom market-rate units to accommodate a range of residents. Through the upgrading

FORMER OFFICE BUILDING IS REINTERPRETED AS A MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL HIGH-RISE



PHOTOS: JUDY DAVIS, ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHER unless otherwise noted

TREND



of the exterior and surrounding elements, reconfiguring of interior floor plans and the addition of thoughtful amenities, Cooper Carry was able to strategically recycle the shell of a former office building for a more purposeful use.

Evolving the Exterior Structure

The first order of business for the design team was to devise a workable plan to update and reimagine the building's exterior, contemporizing the nearly 50-year-old tower's original façade to better align with the changing face of the neighborhood while retaining key elements of the existing structure.

Built in 1972, the tower had been hard hit by years of degradation. A vision of the previous century, The Foundry was in dire need of a facelift, prompting the design team to gut and strip the building of its outdated features and start from scratch. Using the historic, brick-clad architectural vernacular present in Old Town Alexandria as a primary source of inspiration for the new and improved façade, the tower was reskinned in red brick-faced precast concrete panels, a time-saving measure that prevented the development team from having to spend on traditionally laid brick.

Diminutive windows were replaced with expansive warehouse-style treatments that allowed for higher levels of natural light inside the building, and the design team added three additional floors to the previous 13 levels. To break up and freshen the outward expression of the building, slick metal paneling was affixed to the uppermost levels, facilitating an industrial-meets-modern look favored by ownership. The team also incorporated a series of staggered, recessed balconies designed to mix up the façade and create a sense of playfulness and changing shadows.

BEFORE

PHOTO: COOPER CARRY





Office-to-residential conversions bear repeating in other urban cores grappling with an oversupply of demand foiled by an undersupply of inventory.



Right-sized Residential

One prominent challenge faced by the design team during the renovation was adapting the original layout of the office building to conform to what is commonly found in residential builds. Drawing a sharp contrast to typical residential dimensions of 65- to 70-foot deep, The Foundry's extensive 374-foot length and 124-foot depth already were larger than the average office floor plate—and required extra creativity.

After the interior of the building was gutted, the design solution included filling excess space at the core with multi-floor amenity spaces, creating residential units with mid-point entries, rather than entrances at either end of the building, and implementing additional personal storage areas for residents. Apartment units form the perimeter of the building, strategically placed to maximize daylight. The interiors of the residences feature a loft aesthetic with exposed concrete slab ceilings, ductwork and clerestory windows that leverage high ceiling heights and make units feel larger and enhance access to sunlight. In addition, mechanical and plumbing systems were brought up to code through the renovation.

There was also the issue of parking, which needed to be provided to accommodate city requirements for multifamily developments. To address the problem, three of the old office floor slabs were converted into parking—one of the catalysts for the creation of additional floors to replace lost square footage for apartment units.

Elevating Amenities

Significant square footage of the building is allocated to amenities, a win-win byproduct of the too-large footprint depth challenge. In addition to housing stairs, electrical rooms and elevators, the central core of the building is also where amenities live, including a three-level gym, featuring cardio, weight-lifting and a yoga studio; a two-level bar; a makerspace; and a lounge room for neighborly hangouts.

Dual rooftop entertaining spaces deliver impressive views of the nearby Masonic Temple and historic Old Town Alexandria. Featuring lush landscaping, intimate seating arrangements, a partially covered terrace and outdoor grills, the first rooftop is an ideal setting for open-air gatherings. The southwest-facing, 14th-floor, second rooftop is akin to a retreat, where residents can take a dip in the heated pool and relax on chaise lounges while enjoying an



The Foundry's extensive 374-foot length and 124-foot depth already was larger than the average office floor plate—and required extra creativity. After the interior of the building was gutted, the design solution included filling excess space at the core with multi-floor amenity spaces. Meanwhile, apartment units (left) form the perimeter of the building, strategically placed to maximize daylight





The relative walkability and transit-adjacency made the building ripe for redevelopment.





outdoor environment anchored by a diverse array of plant species.

At the base level, Cooper Carry made room for expansive retail space. Spanning 25,000 square feet, the retail portion of the building is designed to fit a range of uses, from local eateries and fitness studios to a daycare center and retail shops as a welcome resource for residents and locals alike.

Improving the Pedestrian Experience

Although the viability of the building for an office-to-residential conversion was an important consideration for the development team, the location and liveliness of the surrounding neighborhood were key factors in determining The Foundry's potential for success.

Located in Alexandria's vibrant East Eisenhower District, a neighborhood well regarded as an urban hotspot for unique shopping and dining destinations, The Foundry is about a block away from the Eisenhower Metro Station. This relative walkability and transit-adjacency made the building ripe for redevelopment. The building is also close to the forthcoming Carlyle's Crossing mixed-use development, which will be anchored by Alexandria's first Wegmans grocery store. To root the revitalized tower within its environment and enhance the pedestrian experience, Cooper Carry implemented a variety of upgrades at the street-level to foster a strong urban connection.

Working together with the city government, Cooper Carry rescaled the street, enlarging sidewalks and downsizing the roadway to better engage pedestrian activity and allow residents to explore the neighborhood on foot more easily. The redesign also involved the inclusion of parallel parking for a more city-leaning setting. In addition, one entrance to the building serves as a direct connection to a covered walkway that leads to the nearby transit station.

Paving the Way for Future Development

The Foundry opened for resident move-ins in Fall 2020, boasting strong momentum on the leasing front as potential dwellers flock to urbanizing alcoves of the city. Demand for housing is not unique to the Washington, D.C., metro region, and office-to-residential conversions bear repeating in other urban cores grappling with an oversupply of demand foiled by an undersupply of inventory.

As additional vacant space comes up for grabs in the coming months and years ahead as the pandemic weeds out a glut of outdated office properties, there's enormous potential for the adaptive reuse of these buildings. Serving as an example for future community-focused multifamily developments, The Foundry is a blueprint for what can become of a little reimagination. 

Retrofit Team //

ARCHITECT // Cooper Carry, www.coopercarry.com, in partnership with Perseus TDC, perseustdc.com
GENERAL CONTRACTOR // Balfour Beatty, www.balfourbeattyus.com
CIVIL/SITE ENGINEER AND LANDSCAPE // Christopher Consultants, www.christopherconsultants.com
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER // SK&A Structural Engineering Consulting, www.skaengineers.com
MEP ENGINEER // Integrated Design Consultants LLC, www.idcmep.net
LIFE SAFETY // Jensen Hughes, www.jensenhughes.com
INTERIOR DESIGN // Studios Architecture, www.studios.com
LIGHTING DESIGN // Palindrome Design Associates, www.palindromedesign.us
VRF INSTALLER // Havtech, www.havtech.com

Materials //

PRECAST // Arban & Carosi, www.arbanarosi.com
BRICK // Taylor Clay Products Inc., taylorclaybrick.com
METAL PANELS // Reynobond, www.arconic.com
CURTAINWALL AND STOREFRONT // YKK AP America Inc., www.ykkap.com
WINDOWS // Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope, www.crhamerica.com/building-envelope
ROOFING MEMBRANE, AMENITY DECK // American Hydrotech, www.hydrotechusa.com
AMENITY DECK PAVERS // Hanover Architectural Products, www.hanoverpavers.com
GLASS AND ALUMINUM GUARDRAILS // Atlantic Aluminum Products, www.atlantaluminumproducts.com
ENERGY STAR APPLIANCES // GE Appliances, www.geappliances.com
WATERSENSE PLUMBING FIXTURES // Delta, www.deltafaucet.com
RESIDENTIAL UNIT LIGHTING // Abra Lighting, abralighting.com
AMENITY AREA LIGHTING // Lighthouseed, lighthouseedlighting.com; Apparatus, apparatusstudio.com; WAC Lighting, www.waclighting.com; and Luminii, www.luminii.com