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Luxury apartments, civic center to join Lenexa City Center mix



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Apartment developers [Steve Coon](#) and [Terry O'Leary](#) are nothing if not perceptive.

Thus, after [Perceptive Software](#) LLC began building its two new 120,000-square-foot headquarters buildings in Lenexa City Center this year, the pair began eyeing an adjacent site for their next project.

Then Lenexa officials committed to start building a nearby 200,000-square-foot civic center soon, and Coon and O'Leary knew the time and place for The Domain at City Center were right.

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Principals in an apartment development and management firm called ePartment Communities LLC, Coon and O'Leary received preliminary plan approval for the project last month from the Lenexa City Council.

Located at 88th Street and Penrose Lane, the 203-unit luxury apartment project will be located just south of the Lenexa Civic Center site and just north of the Perceptive Software campus.

O'Leary said The Domain at City Center project would advance according to the same development model he and Coon have deployed for other successful high-density, lifestyle-oriented complexes, including The Village at Mission Farms in Overland Park and 51 Main in Kansas City. Specifically, ePartment Communities will design the project, obtain the necessary city approvals, find an equity partner to share in the ownership and, finally, manage the completed project.

CAPSTONE AWARDS 2013: [The Village at Mission Farms](#)

Coon and O'Leary have become known as visionaries since entering Kansas City's evolving apartment market about 10 years ago. Their first apartment project, Barrewoods near Missouri Highway 152 and Barry Road, was the first project in the country to offer free wireless Internet access.

That [project was started in 2003](#), at which time potential investors asked the developers if they really believed people would ever use computers at home, O'Leary said.

Ten years later, Coon and O'Leary are [now working on 51 Main](#), a project on the [Country Club Plaza](#) that will include the first apartment units in the country with 1-gigabit Internet service via Google Fiber.

In addition to keeping up with technology, ePartment Communities also keeps an eye on the past. Settingwise, their projects are throwbacks to dwelling places in long-established suburban mixed-use pockets like Kansas City's Brookside and Waldo neighborhoods, O'Leary said.

Unlike those older areas, however, The Domain will have an urban, contemporary feel. Aimed at the renter by choice, O'Leary added, the project's high-end touches and surroundings will wipe out the stigma associated with conventional apartment living.

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"We like the City Center location because Lenexa is a bedroom community and its demographics suggested it would welcome a full-scale mixed-use development with the residences, offices, retail, restaurants, hotels and so on," he said.

The partners also liked the fact that the development was master-planned — "We like to know what things are going to look like around our projects," O'Leary said — and that the portion of City Center where they will build is controlled by an experienced master developer, [Copaken Brooks](#).

Construction of The Domain is expected to begin next spring, a few months before work on the first 100,000-square-foot phase of the new civic center begins next door.

Lenexa City Administrator [Eric Wade](#) said the Lenexa City Council voted last month to include money for the civic center's design in the city's capital improvements plan. The first phase will include recreational facilities, city offices and limited retail, he said.

FLASHBACK: [Lenexa City Center developer Shawnee Village Associates files Chapter 11](#)

City officials have also been in discussions with the Johnson County Library about moving its Lackman branch to the new civic center. Wade said libraries of the future will be smaller, due to the need for less hard-copy materials, and "housed in civic environments where multiple community activities are going on."

In keeping with that theme, Lenexa officials are also hoping to include space for college classes in the new civic center.

Though the civic center uses aren't all known, Wade added, one thing that's not up in the air is the financing for the structure. It will come from a 3/8th-cent sales tax approved by Lenexa voters in 2008.

That's about the time that the recession kicked in, stopping early Lenexa City Center development in its tracks. During the past year, however, it has taken off with the aforementioned projects and others, including the recent relocation of B.E. Smith's corporate headquarters to the City Center East portion of the 200-acre, four-quadrant development. In addition, a new Hyatt Place hotel and conference center and a 552-unit apartment complex were recently approved for City Center East.

RELATED: [B.E. Smith's leap of faith jump-starts Lenexa City Center](#)

Construction on the apartment project, Block Real Estate Services' WaterCrest at City Center, is [expected to start this fall](#).

The Domain will be the third apartment project launched in Lenexa City Center, Wade said. The first, the 309-unit West End at City Center, recently opened at full occupancy in City Center North, he said.

"This (Domain project) will push the number of units in Lenexa City Center to over 1,000," Wade said. "That means more than 2,000 residents right there, which is awesome.

"It's a great addition to the whole development, because City Center's a place. And when you're creating a place, you need to have residents living there, businesses succeeding there and retailers thriving there for it to be authentic and genuine."