

Capitalizing On The Waterfront

D.C.'s new project, The Wharf, aims to bring visitors and residents to the city's underutilized waterfront.

Randall Shearin



Located along the Washington Channel, The Wharf will feature a mix of uses, including 400,000 square feet of retail, restaurant and entertainment space.

Visitors to Washington, D.C., generally recognize that two rivers run through the city when they land at Reagan National Airport or cross the Potomac or Anacostia by car. But most don't make a point to spend time along the District's riverfronts because there aren't a lot of attractions nearby. Locals

often find the riverfronts inaccessible from the Washington, D.C., side due to limited parking and tricky roadways. A new mixed-use project, The Wharf, aims to make Washington's riverfront a major destination and attraction. The project's developers, Madison Marquette and P.N. Hoffman, are creating an environment

that is engaging and energized throughout the day, week and year to attract both locals and visitors.

Located on 24 acres along the Washington Channel, which sits between the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, The Wharf will ultimately have 3.2 million square feet of retail, restaurant, residential, hotel, office and cultural space. P.N. Hoffman was awarded the project in 2006, before the Great Recession. Madison Marquette became involved with a 50 percent interest in the project in 2010. The venture – Hoffman-Madison Waterfront – now has joint responsibility for the overall development, bringing together their respective experiences – and expertise – in the development and operations of the project.

The neighborhood will mix 950,000 square feet of Class A office space, more than 1,300 multifamily and condominium residential units, three hotels, including an Intercontinental Hotel, and 400,000 square feet of retail, restaurant and entertainment. A 6,000-seat live music venue by local culture impresario and 9:30 Club owner Seth Horowitz will also be part of the project.



Making Washington, D.C.'s waterfront more accessible is one goal of The Wharf.

THE WHARF

The Wharf sits along approximately one mile of waterfront, and the development partners will activate over 50 acres of water in the Channel, as well. Madison Marquette and P.N. Hoffman intend to open the first phase of the project, now under construction, in October 2017.

The Hoffman-Madison Waterfront partnership has focused its efforts on creating a top destination for both residential and commercial residents, as well as tourists. Just as the food scene has flourished across the Mid-Atlantic region (see related article on Washington, D.C.'s restaurant boom on page 330), The Wharf will be home to a dynamic group of new concept restaurants – adding to the historic Fish Market that has been located at the site for more than 200 years.

“Our merchandising strategy is to bring to The Wharf best-in-class local and regional food operators who have proven concepts and strong followings,” says Tom Gilmore, senior managing director of Madison Marquette and president of its real estate services group. “These operators are taking advantage of the robust market and growth opportunities in the greater DC market. Each is creating a new concept that will be unique only to The Wharf.”

Chefs who have signed on at The Wharf include Fabio Trabocchi, chef and owner of Fiola, Casa Luca and Fiola Mare, and “Top Chef” competitor Mike Isabella, who has opened Kapnos Kouzina, Graffitiato, Pipita, and a number of other highly ac-



The Wharf will combine new with old to create a unique environment.

claimed restaurants. Star mixologist Todd Thrasher, of Bar PX and Restaurant Eve in neighboring Alexandria, Virginia, will also add to the culinary and cocktail scene with the Potomac Distilling Company, a commercial rum distillery and two-story tavern adjacent to the Fish Market.

“Currently, we do not have any national food chains in the mix,” says Gilmore. “We are not averse to bringing in the right ones, but we are trying to establish a distinct restaurant offering that is unique to the market and the project.”

A market hall concept is in development for The Wharf and is envisioned as part grocery and part dining. During the original design phases, Gilmore says that the developers and designers “choreographed” every space at the project where food would play a role. Then, along with

the leasing team, the developers looked at what existed in the market and what should exist at The Wharf.

“Food has become such a critical anchor and key driver for projects today,” says Gilmore. “In a project like this with a significant vertical component including residential, office and hospitality, as well as a large live-entertainment venue, a thoughtful culinary mix is essential to the project’s long-term success. We looked at many of the operators in the market, and asked some of them to consider creating a more casual version of their more formal dining concepts. For some of the smaller operators, we asked them to explore more expanded or updated versions of their existing concepts. ‘Curation’ is a well-worn phrase these days in our business, but it does best describe our approach. We’ve been very careful in curating the food experience so that we cover a number of categories and do not replicate what is already in the market.”

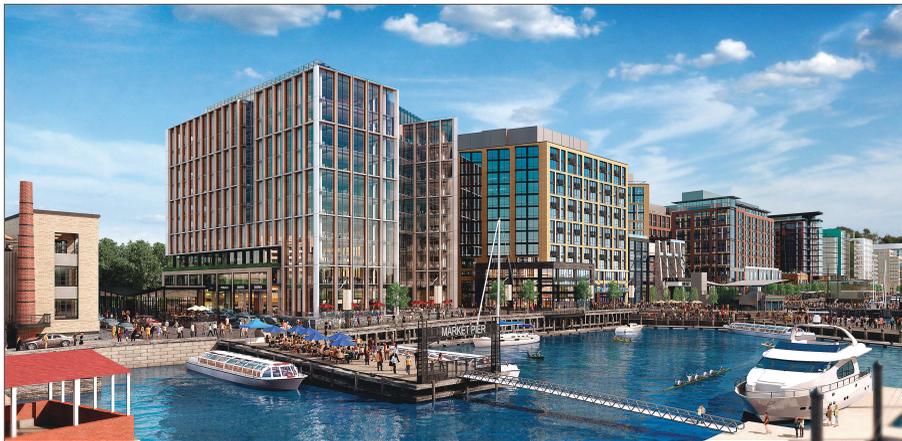
The strategy for retail throughout the neighborhood is similar. There will be some recreation-related retail focused on the active lifestyle of the area’s residents. Hoffman-Madison has been working with many local, well established retailers to locate at The Wharf. The company hasn’t released any of the retailers it has signed, and won’t until closer to opening.

“We want a mix of smaller yet established brands who have strong followings through both a limited number of brick-and-mortar stores and online presence,” says Gilmore. “There is a great universe



The Wharf will have 950,000 square feet of office space, more than 1,300 multifamily units, three hotels and retail, restaurant and entertainment space.

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Madison Marquette is carefully curating the retail and restaurant mix for The Wharf.

of local and regional specialty retailers looking for unique retail locations in the District – and we certainly believe The Wharf is one of these.”

Madison Marquette is leveraging its internal retail merchandising and emerging retail brand with two recently hired specialists for its leasing department to assist with the merchandising at The Wharf and other Madison properties. Both come

from non-traditional shopping center backgrounds.

Katherine McMillan, who is based in Brooklyn, was a partner in launching a pop-up market for small high-end manufacturers called Northern Grade. The concept operated pop-ups in 25 markets, and now has a permanent location in New York City’s Seaport District. The Wharf will feature an area that is focused

on these new brands, with shorter lease spans that allow the company to rotate these tenants several times per year.

“Katherine is very savvy to the emerging brands coming out of New York, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and elsewhere who have very little, if any, brick-and-mortar presence today,” says Gilmore. “Many of these brands are lacking capital for distribution and do not have a physical store presence. Katherine will address how we can define more sustainable platforms for these types of brands. Rotating these tenants will help keep The Wharf fresh, while also allowing us to incubate these brands.”

Dane Tekin has worked with luxury brands throughout her 20-year career, most recently with Louis Vuitton. She will work on merchandising and positioning retailers for growth.

“It is not that we are not interested in national chains,” says Gilmore. “We believe in the right retail tenants for the projects. Emerging brands and edgier concepts are really what will fit the bill for this shopper. We’ve had great interest from these retailers as we exit our curating

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The Wharf will create a place where the urban grid of Washington, D.C., meets the waterfront.

mode and continue to move forward with our active leasing.”

First and foremost, Hoffman-Madison wants The Wharf to increasingly be “home” to the residents of Washington, D.C., and the surrounding area. The developers want to serve the local market first. Expanding that effort, The Wharf will become a large attraction for those from the larger region, as well as tourists.

“By serving the local market well, more people who are visiting the District will visit The Wharf the same way that they go to Georgetown, the Mall, 14th Street and the other emerging areas of the city,” says Gilmore. “Creating a place where the urban grid of Washington meets the waterfront has been an incredible opportunity.

If we stay true to our demographic, then the world will find its way to us.”

Part of enticing the local community is making it convenient for residents to visit. The project will be easily walkable from the L’Enfant Plaza area and nearby Metro stops, in addition to a bike station. For those who choose to drive, the developers are planning multiple valet drops to make The Wharf easy to access. The project will also have dedicated taxi and ride-share drop-off areas, and will become a part of a new, broader water taxi system that will connect people to Hains Point and National Harbor.

Hoffman-Madison has studied a number of waterfront developments around the world to bring best practices to The

Wharf, and to find out key characteristics as to what makes the projects successful. It has also studied some marketplace projects that have had success over the years. These include San Francisco’s Ferry Building Marketplace, Chelsea Market in New York and Faneuil Hall in Boston. The company has also looked at a number of emerging retail districts in Brooklyn, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle.

“We are looking at not only the types of food and retail, but how the offerings are being presented,” says Gilmore. “Because The Wharf is new construction, we have the opportunity to create an entirely new type of environment – with a palpable grit and texture. The great thing about emerging districts is that they don’t feel so cohesive – you have a great juxtapositioning of new versus old. In new construction, you have to create that through careful design and merchandising.”

The developers are also activating the waterfront along The Wharf. In addition to a marina, there will be vendors who will rent paddleboards, paddleboats, sailboats and other craft.

“Throughout the year, there will be daily activities – that will only be more amplified in the warmer seasons,” says Gilmore. “We will be activating the waterfront 12 months out of the year through programming and events.” **SCB**



Rendering of one of the retail and restaurant areas at The Wharf.