

## Successful developers key-in on infill, suburban differences

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There is a lot to be said for both urban infill and suburban development, and both are often necessary for a metropolitan area to be healthy and accommodate economic growth and prosperity. Yet the two, while dealing with many of the same issues, are vastly different from the viewpoint of the developers and engineers that plan and design these neighborhoods.



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### Architecture

For an urban infill project, conscientious architects and builders will analyze and study the existing surroundings and the history of the place. They will identify what has worked in drawing homeowners to recently completed neighborhoods and buildings

and what hasn't.

In Delray Beach, for example, the city has taken the initiative and cleaned up downtown Atlantic Avenue, which has once again become the focal point of the city and a destination for the surrounding areas.

As a younger, more professional and sophisticated crowd began looking to live in Delray Beach, it gave developers more leeway to build high-end, luxury developments with real architectural styling. Savvy developers looked to the city's history and have created homes that reflect both the city's historical colonial/Key West atmosphere, with Delray's new reputation as a modern, vibrant place to live.

Suburban developments generally deal with a blank slate when it comes to design and architecture. As suburban developments are generally trying to appeal to a single demographic — whether it's families, the over-55 crowd or first-time homebuyers — the lack of

### GUEST COLUMN

a historical sense of place or established architectural theme allows developers to build something more of their choosing.

### Design and sense of place

In suburbia, height and density can often be points of contention, even where planning and zoning restrictions are lenient. For instance, height restrictions may allow for, say, a five-story building, it might behoove a developer to build a three-story unit with a step back in front of a five-story building to give the development a gentler scale and more curb appeal. We've found this to be a friendlier approach, and ultimately more successful.

Additionally, suburban developments require the developer to create a sense of place, a sense of community for

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each development. This may mean a clubhouse, a neighborhood pool or tennis courts, or even placing the mailboxes in a central location so that the residents meet their neighbors and feel they are part of a cohesive environment.

In urban areas, that sense of place is built in. Amenities such as movie theaters, restaurants, bars and even public transportation options are probably within walking distance.

Height and density requirements can be restrictive in an urban infill project, but often the developer will take full advantage of the height and density allowances. The city wants to create a destination where people can work, live and play in the same area, using that density as an advantage without increasing vehicular traffic.

## Cost and amenities

Generally, in urban areas, buyers are willing to pay a premium for living downtown. Thus, the cost of buying the unit is not going to be based on an entry-level buyer. These purchasers will be looking closely at what they get for their money, including the finishes, the appliances and the attention to details.

Again, knowing what has been successful in that area can help guide developers whether to invest in higher-end appliances or to create fewer units with more space. Some of these things will be determined for you through a market study.

For suburban developments, the buyers have a set amount they want to

spend, and they want to know how much square footage they are getting for each dollar and where that space goes. The urban crowd is more adaptable, whereas suburbanites are looking at more face value. You have to adapt to them.

## Environment

With urban infill developments, there's a current, expected environmental impact. Electrical lines and water/sewer mains and pipes usually already exist and are in place, and drainage conditions are already established. A developer simply has to adapt to what's there.

It's more forgiving on the environmental scale but more limiting on the human scale. You also must do your due diligence to what was there, especially with regard to hazardous materials.

In suburban areas, a developer has to be more environmentally conscious, as you're dealing with larger-scale environmental issues. For example, because the soil may have never been built on before, tests will need to be conducted, as there are times the soil isn't capable of withstanding the load of the structures you want to build.

Developers attuned to the differences that make urban infill and suburban development so disparate will be able to create successful communities no matter where they build.

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