



# The Capital

## 1901 West work complete, 40% leased

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**H**e was hesitant at first, but Clay Ellis said shelling out \$1,300 a month for a one-bedroom apartment at 1901 West was one of the best decisions he's made.

"I don't like paying rent but, I feel like it's my own place," said the 31-year-old who moved into the mixed-use development at the corner of West Street and Chinquapin Round Road Dec. 1. "You just don't feel like it's an apartment. You feel like it's a condo."

Mr. Ellis is one of 131 renters who recently moved into their new digs at 1901 West, which wrapped up construction last month after the project fell six months behind schedule. Delays in building material shipments, bad weather and a mold problem in one of the buildings hampered the project during construction.

"Everything is resolved," said Dean Wilson, a director with Wood Partners, a national home builder and a developer of 1901. "I'm glad it's over."

While 90 of the 300 apartments are leased and a Starbucks opened before Christmas, Mr. Wilson said the delays backed up efforts to fill the complex's remaining 17,121 square feet of ground-level retail and commercial space. Starbucks takes up about 1,500 square feet. Mr. Wilson said he expects most of the retail space to be filled within the next six to nine months, despite being "open."

Meanwhile, traffic has picked up since the sales office moved to the largest building in the complex.

"Typically, this a nonpeak season," said Kathy Abell, a 1901 West assistant property manager.

Stephen Muller, managing principal for the Washington-based Union Realty Partners, which handles the retail side of 1901 West, said his company is in negotiations with several "amenity oriented" tenants, possibly a deli and a dry cleaners. Once leases are signed, tenants will prepare construction plans, and submit them to the city.

"We've gotten a lot of momentum and interest in the retail," said Mr. Muller. "What we're trying to do ... is to be very selective in the type of tenants that we put in there."

Late last year, Union tossed up the idea of a drive-thru bank, but city officials shot it down, saying that a bank at 1901 didn't fit in with the urban pedestrian theme agreed upon and would require a special exception to the business district zoning that encompasses 1901 West.

"Most banks really want drive-thrus," Mr. Muller said. "That's why we're pushing the city so hard."

Situated on the former site of J. F. Johnson's lumber yard at Chinquapin Round Road, the massive complex consists of 300 apartments, 18,621 square feet of retail and commercial space and more than 650 parking spaces, according to city documents. More than 40 of those spaces are underground.

The development is actually three four-story buildings, one of which holds 220 apartments, a movie theater, a fitness center,

a billiards room, and a "cyber cafe" among other amenities.

Another building includes the Starbucks and 50 apartments; the third building holds 30 apartments.

Before the roof was put on the 220-apartment building, mold developed because "excessive rain got the wood wet," Mr. Wilson said. He said spray bleach was used to get rid of the mold, but that ended up corroding some pipes. Mr. Wilson said the pipes were replaced and that a company specializing in mold removal got rid of the problem.

"Yes, there was a mold issue," said Mr. Wilson, who declined to comment on how much it cost his company to fix the problem. "They tented part of one building and blasted it, and we have a 10-year warranty. Every living organism in that thing was killed. So mold is not an issue anymore."

In 2003, city officials approved the 1901 West project as apartments and construction began.

Two years later, the developers changed plans to switch the apartments to condos, but still dedicated 36 units to be sold as moderately priced dwellings, said Mr. Wilson.

But as the housing market continued to slow, the developer last year switched the complex back to apartments.

"It was obviously driven by the market," Mr. Muller said. "We were at the tail end of the condo market, and we would be better off going back to our original strategy."

While the 1901 apartments are some of the most expensive in the city, 18 are rented out for below market rate. In 2004, the city passed the "moderately priced dwelling

unit" law. It requires developments of 10 units or more to provide 12 percent of for-sale housing and six percent of rentals to be set aside as moderately priced.

The moderately priced apartments at 1901 - which can be rented for roughly \$560 a month to about \$976 a month - are all leased and occupied. Meanwhile, rent for the market-rate apartments range from about \$1,100 month to approximately \$2,220 a month.

Although she would have preferred condos, Ward 3 Alderwoman Classie Hoyle, a proponent of the complex from day one, said she was pleased that 1901 West includes some moderately priced apartments.

"I'm just pleased that this opportunity is in Ward 3," she said.

Since September Brittany Dunkleberger, a 25-year-old employee with the city's department of planning and zoning, lucked out on a moderately priced one-bedroom unit at 1901 West for \$632 a month. Her apartment is worth \$1,300 a month, said David Thompson, 1901 West property manager.

Ms. Dunkleberger said she's been busy decorating her apartment, and getting to know her neighbors, mostly young professionals. She works out in the fitness room, heads to Starbucks, and walks over to "The Whiskey 1803" club featuring live music. She looked at other housing options in Annapolis, but said it would mean shelling out hundreds of dollars a month just to be a roommate.

"I always say 'I don't know where I'd be living,'" she said.

- No Jumps-