

INTERESTING DEVELOPMENTS

Apartments, a hotel and commercial construction may signal the return of boom times to the Pearl

Story by Phil Favorite | Photos by John M. Vincent



For the past decade, the Pearl District has been symbolic of Portland's meteoric housing and retail boom — and its subsequent recession-induced cooling-off period.

All the while, local developers have patiently adjusted to the slow-recovering economy and changing market conditions. Demand for more rental housing has spurred recent growth in the availability of apartments, for example, and that trend appears to be gaining momentum.

In fact, signs of growing confidence are visible throughout the neighborhood, and no grander in scale than the arrival of Vestas Wind Systems, which will be moving its North American headquarters into the newly remodeled Meier & Frank depot building on Northwest Everett Street. With the arrival this spring of Vestas and its 400 local employees, developers are again putting their faith in the neighborhood's cache as a residential and retail beacon for the city.

"We're still in an environment where people are a little unsure, but we definitely are seeing people come out of hibernation," says Debbie Thomas, owner of **Debbie Thomas Real Estate** (402 NW 13th; 503-226-2141) and a longtime fixture in the Pearl District.

A new owner at Kearney Plaza and the opening of rental units at Broadstone Enso and the fast-rising Janey building — all boasting the high style and sustainability for which the neighborhood is known — illustrates a confident local response to changing residential demands. And plans for a 225-room, extended-stay hotel — a Residence Inn by Marriott expected to be ready for occupancy in 2014 — has neighborhood residents and advocates buzzing.

"The fact that the hotel is coming sends a great message," Thomas says. "We really needed that."

Left: Artists' conceptions for the North American home of Vestas Wind Systems (top) and a tree-filled courtyard at the heart of The Parker apartment building (bottom) paint a portrait of environmentally friendly, stylish additions to the Pearl. Above: Developer Robert Ball says The Parker is his response to growing demand for rental units in the district.

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Here's a look at three new projects — in various stages of design and development — that have neighbors and investors optimistic for the long-term future of Pearl District real estate:

Vestas: Gathering in the Pearl

With a highly educated work force and a reputation as a hub for clean energy, Portland has been a perfect fit for Denmark-based Vestas since the company opened operations here in 2002.

Continual expansion of its local operation pushed Vestas executives to look for a building to house its North American headquarters, and they found what they were looking for in the old Meier & Frank depot building at 1417 NW Everett.



Above: Work continues on The Janey, a six-story, 50-unit apartment building at the corner of Northwest 12th and Everett. Opposite: When remodeling work ends, the former Dynagraphics building on Northwest 14th will house a restaurant, brewery and office space.

The move allows Vestas to put most of its local workforce — currently working in five different buildings in downtown Portland — under one roof, with space for another 250 employees. A \$66 million renovation is transforming the old warehouse, which has been empty since 2001, into a bustling hub certain to spark retail activity and residential real estate demand in the neighborhood.

“People are really excited to be moving into the Pearl District,” says Andrew Longetieg, a Vestas spokesman. “It’s a vibrant neighborhood. It’s a great location. We were looking at quite a few different places to move, but this was the best fit.”

Renovation plans call for creating a modern work environment inside the building, while preserving much of the historic look and feel of the classic warehouse. Inside, a central atrium will create a light-filled space; outside, replica windows will combine a traditional look with modern energy efficiency.

Matching the company’s profile as a generator of renewable energy, the remodel features large-scale energy-saving features that allowed the building to target LEED Platinum status, including:

- a 112-kilowatt rooftop solar panel array that will provide 12 percent of the building’s energy needs;
- a 160,000-gallon rainwater cistern providing non-potable water for toilets, landscaping and other water needs;
- use of wood harvested from the Willamette and other nearby rivers;
- secured parking for 80 bicycles;
- and electric car-charging stations, as well as parking spots reserved for Zipcar sharing services.

Overall, the renovation is designed to fit the company’s profile — and the Pearl’s reputation — as a leader in renewable energy and green building.

“When you think about it, we’re recycling the building,” Longetieg says. “It has really strong bones.”

The Parker: Distinction and style

Among a handful of new projects hoping to capitalize on the soaring demand for residential rental units in Portland, The Parker will offer 177 apartments in a six-story building that will cover the entire block bounded by Northwest 12th and 13th avenues and Northwest Pettygrove and Quimby streets.

According to Robert Ball, the project’s developer, building a brand-new apartment complex is his response to market demands.

“The housing market is really challenged because of the recession,” Ball says. “There was basically a moratorium on new construction. We have an oversupply of for-sale housing. When people aren’t buying, we’re seeing more people renting.”

Ball has a reputation for preserving and converting historic buildings into spaces that combine high style with modern amenities. In that way, the newly built Parker will be no different. The U-shaped building will include a south-facing courtyard meant to be an extension of the living units, with sitting areas, barbecues and fire pits. Units are designed to maximize space and will feature 9-foot ceilings, large windows and washers and dryers.

The Parker will also feature 181 parking spaces, 180 bicycle stalls, storage units for every resident, a dog-washing area, a bicycle repair station, a coffee bar, a workout facility and an interior meeting room.

Ball describes the exterior design as “neoclassical” with a nod to the Art Deco style, with bays as strong vertical elements. The perimeter of the building’s ground floor will feature stylish live/work spaces.



"It's going to bring life to the North Pearl," says Ball, who envisions using the courtyard to host neighborhood events. "It's going to help with the shortage of rental units, it's going to provide hundreds of jobs, and it's going to generate about \$2 million in revenue for the city."

Marriott: A first for the Pearl

Early next year, a 47,000-square-foot parcel at Northwest Ninth and Marshall will begin its transformation from sleepy vacant lot to bustling construction site when ground is broken for a new Residence Inn by Marriott. And when it's done (plans call for an April 2014 opening), the six-story building will literally be a beacon for activity in the northeast corner of the Pearl.

Already through the permitting phase and in the final stages of design, the hotel will feature 225 extended-stay guest rooms, some with kitchens and business offices; 3,000 square feet of conference space; and a pool and fitness area.

The main entrance to the hotel will be on Northwest Ninth Avenue, where a lighted tower will serve as a colorful nighttime beacon for the neighborhood. A bar is also expected to be included in the plans and open to the public. Plans also call for overhangs at street level, with eaves and a place on Northwest Ninth Avenue for sidewalk tables adjacent to a hotel restaurant.

"We think it's really important to the neighborhood to have that space," says Patricia Gardner, chair of the Pearl District Neighborhood Association's planning, transportation and design review committee.

The building will have a contemporary design, with visual interest created by varied window rows. It will be the same height as the Lexis on the Park condominium building across the street.

While an April 2014 opening may seem to be a long way off, Debbie Thomas points out that once construction starts, neighbors will be surprised how quickly it comes together.

"It's going to be a couple of years, but that time is going to fly by," she says. "We'll get a lot of really great activity buzzing around the hotel. It's going to really anchor that north end of the neighborhood." ■