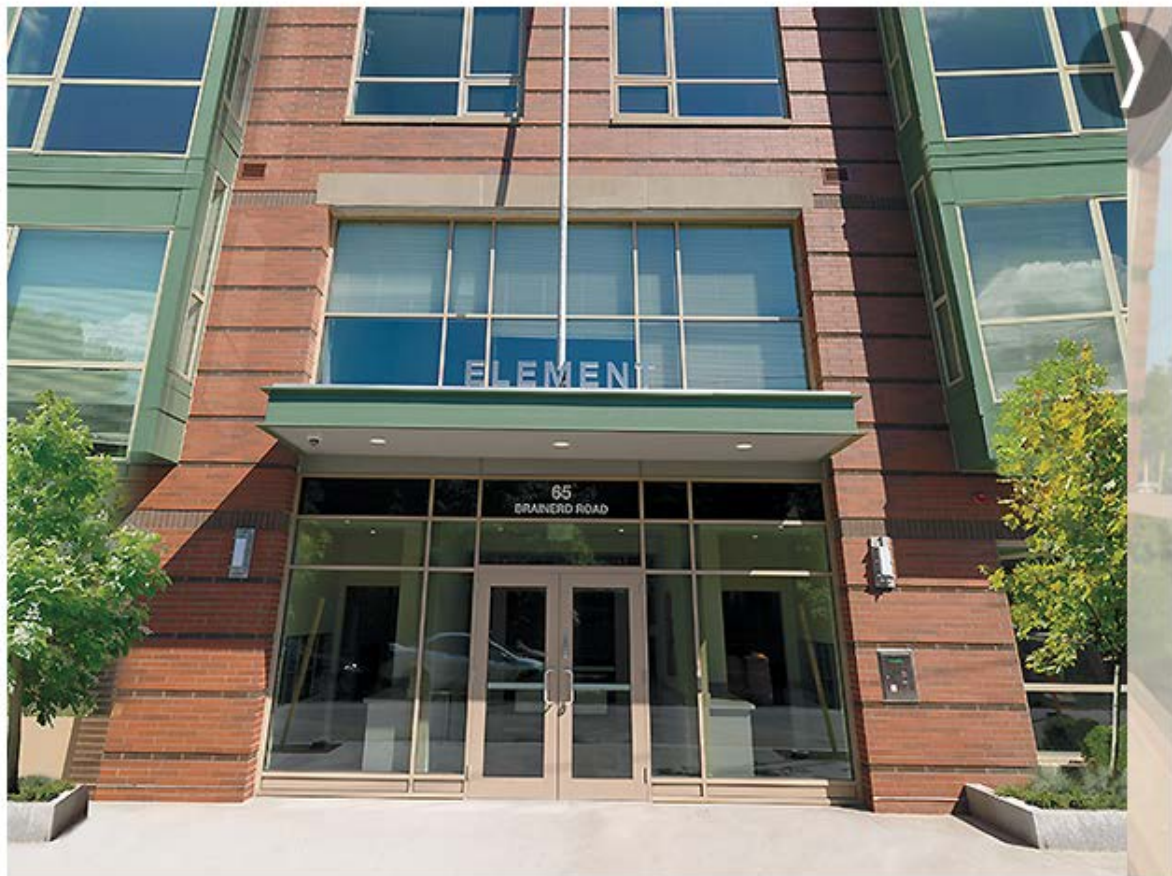


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Luxe Living: The Allston Green District

BY JESSICA LANIEWSKI



Entrance to The Element

Sexy city views, rooftop yoga, and a luxury movie theater make the Allston Green District the hottest new rental complex in the city. Add in the fact that all the buildings will be LEED-certified and the appeal becomes that much greater. Boston was the first city in the nation to adopt Green Building Zoning in 2007, which called for reduced emissions from privately owned buildings; it also required all buildings of more than 50,000 square feet to adhere to the US Green Building Council's LEED certification standards. Now Back Bay-based The Mount Vernon Company is leading the way for sustainable housing and living with the introduction of the Allston Green District. Working in cooperation with the city, the company is building and managing more than 500 sustainable studios, one-, and two-bedroom units, including 200 existing apartments in the district.

The seven-building complex will cover a two-block area along Commonwealth Avenue, Griggs Street, and Brainerd Road. The three new structures will be LEED Silver, Gold, and Platinum certified, and the three existing residential buildings and one ground-level retail space will be upgraded with new high-efficiency heating systems and insulated walls. The first 100-unit building, The Element, at 65 Brainerd Road, was completed on July 1, and the second construction, The Edge, a 79-unit building at 60-66 Brainerd Road, broke ground in June and is slated for completion by next summer. It will feature solar panels on the roof, as well as sub-metering of electricity, heating, and water in each unit so tenants know exactly how much energy they are using as they pay for their own utilities.

Bruce A. Percelay, founder and chairman of The Mount Vernon Company, is the driving force behind the Allston Green District. "I was inspired to take the unusual opportunity of owning 500 apartments in one neighborhood and using it to set a new direction in apartment living," says Percelay, who hasn't seen this type of complex anywhere else. The company is taking sustainable building a step further and setting a trend for the rest of the country by having residents sign the city's first "Green Tenant Declaration." Similar to the Green Building Zone code, this declaration outlines what is expected of tenants, such as decreasing their carbon output by lessening energy and water use, increasing recycling, and relying more heavily on public transportation and bicycles. James W. Hunt III, chief of Environmental and Energy Services for the City of Boston, was the motivating force behind this declaration, and The Mount Vernon Company felt that it fit their vision perfectly.

"We have the most progressive standards in the country for green building and energy use," says Hunt. "A green building is only as good as how its occupants use it over time, and so the Green Tenant Declaration is that next step from sustainable development to sustainable living." The new declaration is also aligned with the 2009 Stretch Energy Code that requires new residential and commercial buildings to be 20 percent more energy efficient than the state's basic requirements. To this end, there will be Hubway bicycles and electric car charging stations available to residents. Free yoga classes will be offered on the rooftop deck, and tenants in the new buildings will have access to hydration stations to fill reusable bottles with filtered water. "We are looking to encourage a lifestyle that is not facilitated by landlords," says Percelay, who is excited that residents will play an active role in the sustainability. He points out that tenants use 30 percent less water when they pay for it on their own, and the apartments will be some of the first to have their own separately metered water. Each unit will have its own washer and dryer so residents can keep tabs on exactly how much energy they use.

While the buildings do focus on being "green," there is also an emphasis on comfort and luxury for residents. Common spaces were designed by Marybeth Orlando of The Architectural Team in Chelsea to create a light and modern feeling. The Element has an impressive roof deck (with recycled synthetic grass) that provides a panoramic view of downtown Boston and plenty of space to lounge, read a book, and meet with friends. Residents also can take advantage of the building's movie theater, fully equipped clubroom, and 100 parking spaces with a car wash station. The units have nine-foot ceilings, granite countertops, and of course energy efficient appliances.

"Landlords who become aware of our approach will want to emulate this model, perhaps for economic reasons, however the byproduct will be more environmentally responsible living," says Percelay. "There is nothing wrong with economic motivation leading to environmentally friendly results, and that is what may enable this concept to spread well beyond the borders of Massachusetts." Boston residents now have the opportunity to be an active part of a more sustainable city without giving up a luxurious lifestyle. *The Mount Vernon Company, 29 Commonwealth Ave.,* [S 617-267-0006](tel:617-267-0006).