

# Miller's Court

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

## Seawall Development Company

■ Miller's Court is a mixed-use renovation of an old brick canning factory located in an older section of the city of Baltimore. The renovation of this brownfield site, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is a workforce housing model for others to follow. For 63 years, from 1890 to 1953, this factory housed the H.F. Miller Tin Can and Box Manufacturing Company. Using a creative combination of financing tools, the Miller's Court development team—Seawall Development Company; Marks, Thomas Architects; and Hamel Builders—has turned around the fortunes of this long-abandoned building, supported Baltimore city teachers, and assisted in the recovery of the local community and school system.

Miller's Court stands out in every way, from its distinctive loft-style apartments and attractive commercial spaces, to workforce rental rates for all its units—a system designed to allow teachers to live in the same jurisdiction as the schools in which they work. It was designed specifically to build a sense of community for young educators, challenged with the rigors of teaching in the Baltimore City School System, who are at the forefront of reversing the city's declining population and education system. It has succeeded in creating a cohesive community that supports new Baltimore city teachers.

Miller's Court is a neighborhood catalyst, contributing stability and long-term commitment to a transitional urban district. The development team used focus groups composed of Teach For America participants to understand their unique needs and assist in designing their living spaces and amenities. It also partnered with a local nonprofit and used input from community groups in the surrounding area during the approval process. Many of the lessons to be learned from Miller's Court come from its residents, all of whom are teachers, as well as its office tenants, all of which are education-related organizations.

Through the creative use of various financing tools—principally the New Market Tax Credit, plus federal and state historic tax credits—Seawall has demonstrated a way to bridge the financial gap between what median incomes can afford and the cost to produce high-quality, well-designed homes close to employment locations. A further strategy was to reduce operating expenses by freezing real estate tax assessments at predevelopment levels by using all available enterprise zone, city preservation, and brownfield abatement programs.

Sustainability permeates the project, which has



been certified Gold under the LEED for New Construction rating system. Green features include renewable flooring, reflective roofing, natural lighting, energy-recovery ventilators, promotion of bike use, and a common cooling tower and boiler for the residences.

With a waiting list of 100 teachers, Miller's Court illustrates the strong demand for workforce housing while demonstrating to the development community that it is possible for the private sector to earn attractive profits while delivering such housing with a mission focus. While Seawall has epitomized workforce housing innovation by demonstrating how to lower capital and operational costs through available tax programs, it also has notably taken a long-term, big-picture approach for itself and the city.

Miller's Court is an outstanding example of workforce housing on every level. It combines private profit motive with public cooperation, is replicable where new market and historic tax credits can be obtained, is green, and provides desirable and affordable housing for median-income workers in a classic workforce occupation in the same community in which they are employed. The developer is now in the process of replicating this project in another area of Baltimore in order to provide office space for nonprofits and additional affordable housing for Baltimore city teachers.

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