

Senior living communities on the rise in Hampton Roads, but experts say more are needed

By Sandra J. Pennecke
Inside Business

Feb 27, 2023 at 9:02 am



A rendering of Aviva Pembroke, a senior living community under construction in the heart of Virginia Beach in the Town Center area. (Courtesy rendering)

As the senior population in Hampton Roads continues to grow, so does the need for more living options.

More and more senior living facilities — featuring independent, assisted living and memory care — are appearing throughout Hampton Roads, but the ever-growing need continues.

“The picture is clear,” said Bob McNab, director of Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy at Old Dominion University. “We are aging as a population.”

As baby boomers move into retirement, they are moving out of single-family homes and into multifamily housing, he said.

The most recent census data from 2021 shows that the percentage of Hampton Roads' households with one or more people 60 years or older was 40.4%.

“Couple this with projections of an aging population in need of greater support services, and you have a strong signal for developers to build units aimed squarely at individuals who have retirement income and assets,” McNab said. “With high occupancy ratios and projected increases in future demand, developers know they can build and fill these units.”

One of those new developments is Aviva Pembroke, a senior living community under construction in the Town Center area of Virginia Beach. Part of the vision for the redeveloped Pembroke Mall, now known as Pembroke Square, it is slated to open in late summer 2024.

Located on the corner of Jeanne Street and Constitution Drive, the community will feature 121 independent living apartments, 20 assisted living apartments and 12 memory support units. And 64 of the 121 independent living units have already been reserved.

Pembroke Realty Group, which is partially owned by some principals of Pembroke Square Associates, was hired as development manager for the project.

Initially, the company was looking for complementary uses beyond hotel, residential, retail, office and entertainment for the site, said Ramsay Smith, president of Pembroke Realty Group.

“We found that senior living communities were in higher demand than age-restricted apartments due to the aging population (demographics) and need for future services as they age,” Smith said.

After interest from several senior living owners and developers, Smith said the company partnered with Beth Sholom to develop, own and operate the new community because it is “hometown” and well-respected.

David Abraham, president and CEO of Beth Sholom Village, said it has spent a significant amount of time and energy evaluating the market for a potential new senior living community at this particular site.

“Starting in 2019, we began to engage with a research company to give us a demographic snapshot to ensure that we would be meeting a major need within Hampton Roads,” Abraham said.

The studies, he said, continually found the need for communities for the 75-plus age market to grow in Hampton Roads at a greater rate than national averages.

“This confirmed for us that we were on the right track and that Aviva Pembroke is what the community has been waiting for,” Abraham said.

“Today’s seniors have more active lifestyles than previous generations,” he said. “We recognize this paradigm shift and are encouraging aging with vitality.”

Steve Zollos, CEO of Senior Services of Southeastern Virginia, said that for a number of years, the nonprofit has watched as the bell curve of the baby boomer generation moves into the senior years.

“And what people don’t realize is we are right in the middle of that swell now,” he said. “The older adult population, not just in our area, but also across the country is the fastest-growing segment of our population.”

Zollos said most communities are looking at a 25-30% growth rate in folks 60 years and older and an overall population growth rate of 5-7%. With that, Zollos said Senior Services has seen an increase in demand for a wide variety of services, and housing is one of the biggest issues.

“We’re at a definite deficit in our communities for affordable senior housing,” he said.

Zollos stressed that a senior infrastructure with a livable tax base for older adults needs to be built.

“We have to have affordable housing so that when it’s time for them to downsize, they can do that and hopefully stay in their communities where they have friends and relationships,” he said.

Ideally, Zollos said we need to have a full spectrum of new developments, retirement communities and assisted living facilities to make Hampton Roads as inclusive as possible.

Sandra J. Pennecke, 757-652-5836, sandra.pennecke@insidebiz.com