



Chatham Square

Alexandria, Virginia

Project Type: **Residential**

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PROJECT TYPE

Chatham Square is an urban infill redevelopment project located near the historic district of Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. This U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOPE VI project replaced 100 distressed 1940s-era public housing units on two city blocks, with a higher-density, mixed-income community of 100 market-rate, for-sale luxury townhomes and 52 public housing rental units that were designed to be indistinguishable from the townhouse component.

LOCATION

Inner Suburban

SITE SIZE

4.16 acres/1.68 hectares

LAND USES

Mixed-Income Housing, Multifamily Rental Housing, Townhouses, Affordable Housing, Open Space, Structured Parking

KEYWORDS/SPECIAL FEATURES

- Urban Infill
- Public/Private Partnership
- Pedestrian Friendly



DEVELOPER

EYA
Bethesda, Maryland
301-634-8600
www.eya.com



ARCHITECT

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Vienna, Virginia
703-760-9344
www.lessardgroup.com

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Studio 39
Alexandria, Virginia
703-719-6500
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OTHER KEY DEVELOPMENT TEAM MEMBER

Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority
Alexandria, Virginia
703-549-7115



GENERAL DESCRIPTION

A U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOPE VI project located in the historic district of Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., Chatham Square was a joint effort between the public and private sectors. The structure of the deal gave the public partner a strong economic incentive to sell its land for market-rate development and to help the private partner obtain approvals and ensure the community's success.

Chatham Square comprises market-rate townhomes, public housing rental units, and garage parking for residents. The community lies within walking distance of public transportation, shopping, restaurants, and the city's riverfront parks. Completed in December 2005, the market-rate residences sold quickly—at higher-than-expected prices—and the public housing units are fully leased.

Few, if any, U.S. communities incorporate both public housing units and market-rate homes that sell for as much as \$1 million. A national model for the redevelopment of obsolete public housing led by a market-rate housing developer with minimal government subsidy, Chatham Square does just that, containing 100 market-rate townhouses and 52 public housing units on two city blocks adjacent to a historic district. It is impossible to distinguish the public housing from the market-rate units, and the community's architecture reflects and blends into the Old Town streetscape.

Developer EYA—formerly Eakin/Youngentob Associates—was established in 1992 with the vision of building innovative urban neighborhoods to the highest standards. The company has constructed more than 2,500 homes in what it calls “lifestyle-friendly” residential communities throughout the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The public/private partnership that developed Chatham Square also included the city of Alexandria, the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA), and Fannie Mae. ARHA, which since 1939 has provided public housing for lower-income families in accordance with state and federal statutes and HUD regulations, is a political subdivision of the commonwealth of Virginia. Although it does not receive any municipal funding, its nine commissioners are appointed by the city council.

THE SITE

Chatham Square is located on a two-block site bounded by Pendleton, North Pitt, Princess, and North Royal streets. The site—which lies only four blocks from the Potomac River—formerly was occupied by Samuel Madden Homes, a deteriorated two-story, 100-unit public housing project built during the 1940s. There was little landscaping; land not covered by buildings was paved and used for surface parking. The project, also known as “the Berg,” was home to the African American high school football players featured in the movie *Remember the Titans*, which depicted the consolidation of Alexandria's three racially imbalanced high schools into one in 1971.

The surrounding neighborhood largely consists of historic rowhouses, with a Metrobus parking lot directly to the north and some existing two-story publicly assisted housing units to the east. Although the redevelopment project did not fall under the purview of the city's board of architectural review—since the site falls just outside the boundaries of the Old and Historic District in Alexandria—it was subjected to unusually high design scrutiny by the municipality's planning and zoning department because of its proximity to the historic district. In addition, the ARHA board and the city council, in conjunction with the community, developed a comprehensive set of guidelines that further constrained the site's redevelopment.

PLANNING AND APPROVALS

By the late 1980s, it had become clear that the aging Samuel Madden Homes complex needed more than a simple renovation, and that the best solution would be demolition and redevelopment. Planning to redevelop the public housing project began as early as 1989, and ARHA—which mandated that any redevelopment replace more than half of the demolished public housing on site—announced its first plans to redevelop the site with a private developer partner in 1992. But this announcement was followed by more than a decade of extensive opposition from the surrounding community as well as from existing public housing residents.

In 1996, ARHA published a request for proposals (RFP) to enter into a purchase and sale agreement for the disposition of the land to a private developer partner. The result was the selection of a developer whose plan called for the development of a 198-unit residential high rise. This plan also failed.

In 1998, ARHA applied for—and received—a \$6.7 million HOPE VI grant to redevelop the property as a mixed-income community. The Alexandria Resident Council (ARC) then sued ARHA over the right of first refusal, a suit that was appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where ARHA prevailed. In 2001, after exhausting all remedies under the law against ARHA, the ARC sued HUD; that suit eventually was settled.

Despite the ongoing litigation, in December 2001 ARHA published Phase I of a two-phase request for qualifications (RFQ). Phase I of the solicitation requested qualifications only; its intent was to create a short list of qualified

developers who would move into Phase II (development proposals) of the process. The first phase captured the interest of five developers, two of whom advanced to Phase II. While the Phase I submissions were being scored, the mayor of Alexandria set up a working group to establish key criteria that would provide parameters for the second phase of the process to select a new developer partner.

In order to accomplish this task, the working group held two charrettes—in which ARHA and municipal staff, public housing residents, and other community stakeholders participated—which resulted in criteria that were passed on to the two developers who advanced to Phase II.

EYA's proposal, which was chosen unanimously by a six-member selection committee, responded to many of the issues expressed by stakeholders and met ARHA's financial and housing needs. After EYA's selection in June 2002, the team spent a year demolishing the existing housing, relocating residents, and expediting zoning and development special use permit (DSUP) approvals in order to apply for tax credits in March 2003. All of these processes required careful coordination among city departments to overlap the review processes in an effort to shorten review times.

DESIGN

The ultimate plan, approved by all stakeholders, has a density of 34 units per acre (84 units per hectare) with more than two parking spaces per unit, as well as four public open spaces with both active and passive recreation areas and over 100 new street trees. About a quarter of the 4.16-acre (1.68-hectare) site is dedicated to open space. A closed-off through-street has been restored, reinforcing the city grid system.

Public housing units are distributed proportionally throughout the site, primarily in eight "back-to-back" buildings that contain four market-rate townhomes on the street-facing side and six public rental units that appear to be four townhouses on the interior side. Although the public housing units seem to be a mirror image of the townhomes on the other side, they actually are designed as "two-over-one" apartments, providing ground-floor, handicapped-accessible flats below two-story, townhome-style units. The remaining four public housing units are in corner townhouse-style units that sit above garages owned by an adjacent market-rate homeowner.

Parking spaces for residents of all of the public housing units and the 32 market-rate units in the eight back-to-back buildings are located in eight small, shared underground garages. Additional structures contain all market-rate townhomes. Parking for the 68 market-rate townhomes in these buildings is in private, at-grade two-car garages. Garages are hidden from the street, and parking is accessed through alleys. One of the key design criteria expressed by the city working group was a desire for all units to have street-level entrances; consequently, all of Chatham Square's residences—including the public housing units—have ground-floor doors, which face either the street or the open spaces.

Chatham Square's designers started with a palette of different exterior styles, which they put together in a variety of ways. The goal was to create a streetscape that looks as if it has evolved over time. The community's facades are a mix of colonial, federal, Victorian, Queen Anne, second-empire, and Italianate elevations that were intended to help Chatham Square blend into the surrounding neighborhood. Decorative exterior details—including window casings and shutters, brick and trim work, cornice detailing, and wrought-iron railings—as well as varied roof heights, roof forms, and veneer widths also help the project blend in. The four at-grade garages located below the public housing units are disguised by street-facing facades identical to those of the surrounding townhouses, with windows covered by interior plantation shutters that hide the fact that cars, rather than people, reside within. (Street-facing doors open to landings and stairs that lead up to the public housing units above.)

The market-rate three-bedroom, two-bathroom townhouses comprise three or four finished levels; many contain lofts, and some have rooftop terraces. Other luxury features include hardwood flooring on the main level, crown and chair-rail molding, gas fireplaces, oak stairs, security and advanced wiring systems, two-zone heat and air

conditioning, granite countertops, and state-of-the-art appliances. Homebuyers were able to upgrade interior appointments, but exterior finishes were predetermined by the site plan.

The public housing units contain two or three bedrooms and one, 1.5, or two bathrooms in a variety of configurations. There are 16 ground-floor flats (six of which are accessible for people with disabilities; the other ten can be adapted for use by the disabled) set below 32 two-story, townhouse-style units, as well as four additional townhome-style units set above ground-level garages. Unit and room sizes were constrained by limits on square footage dictated by the commonwealth-administered tax credit financing; room sizes are equivalent to those of similar-sized market-rate apartments. In both the market-rate townhouses and public housing units, living and dining rooms are combined into a single large, open area. Bathrooms in the public housing units have basic layouts, with none of the upscale features (double vanities, soaking tubs, and so forth) found in the market-rate townhomes.

ARHA specified most finishes for the public housing units, focusing on HUD's standard products for durability and economy. Commercial-grade vinyl flooring is used throughout, as are "HUD severe use" cabinetry and laminate-covered plywood countertops. Appliances and plumbing fixtures are basic and trim is minimal. Ceiling heights match those in the adjoining market-rate units and thus are higher than those normally found in new apartments.

The project's legal structures and subdivision platting enable fee simple ownership of the townhomes, with lot lines spanning the underground parking structures. In the four places where a public housing rental unit was built above a private at-grade garage serving an adjacent market-rate townhouse, a "vertical subdivision" was created to allow the homeowners to own their garage while ARHA owns the two-story rental unit above, on its own platted lot.

From an engineering standpoint, grading was a major issue. The site sloped approximately eight feet (2.4 meters) from west to east (toward the river). Yet all accessible units—which face the interior of the site—had to be placed at grade level and reached by paths with minimal slopes. The grade issue made planning the project's vertical layout as challenging as its horizontal layout. The solution involved installing a significant number of retaining walls and a high degree of creativity in how the levels work. The townhouses facing North Pitt Street (to the west) have two-story elevations, while those facing North Royal Street (to the east) have three-story elevations.

FINANCING

The complex deal structure, which enabled ARHA to share in the project's financial success, created strong economic incentives for the housing authority to sell very valuable land and to work with the developer in gaining approvals from the city in the most cost-effective manner. EYA purchased the land for the market-rate townhomes from ARHA with a cash payment of more than 150 percent of the property's appraised value and tied bonus payments to the appreciated sales value of the market-rate units. The proceeds from the sale of the land—which ARHA put into escrow—were used to subsidize the tax credit proceeds in order to cover 100 percent of the cost of construction of the public housing units. Shared costs, including those for site development, design, and approvals, were allocated between the market-rate and affordable housing components. The city approved a \$3.5 million loan to cover potential revenue shortfalls, but there weren't any.

The city funds did not sit idle, however; they were used to bridge certain project costs during the development process, and ARHA ultimately repaid the full amount. The entire capital budget for the Chatham Square public housing was funded from the market-rate land value and low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) equity, without any capital subsidy from HUD. The \$6.7 million HOPE VI grant was used to cover ARHA administrative costs, resident support services, relocation costs, and part of the cost of constructing the remaining 48 replacement public housing units in three scattered off-site locations.

Obtaining 9 percent LIHTC funds for the project also was challenging, because ARHA had to acquire allocations through the competitive process both for the Chatham Square units and for the remaining 48 replacement units on three other sites in other parts of the city, known collectively as Braddock Whiting Reynolds (BWR) Apartments. Together, these projects replaced 100 percent of the public housing units at Samuel Madden Homes, in keeping with ARHA's and the city's policy of no net loss of public housing. Both projects did, in the end, receive 2003 LIHTC

allocations. Fannie Mae, in turn, purchased the tax credits for Chatham Square. Because ARHA had escrowed the funds for the entire development, the investor's money did not have to come into the project until it was fully constructed and leased. Completing the project in this manner resulted in no risk for the investor, so the agency received a good rate for the credits.

EYA served as general contractor for the public housing units and charged ARHA a guaranteed maximum per-unit price of approximately \$217,000. When its costs exceeded that price, EYA absorbed the difference. In addition to the proceeds from the land sale, ARHA ultimately realized more than \$3 million in bonus payments.

EYA obtained traditional equity and debt financing for the market-rate units. Wachovia Bank, the construction lender, was comfortable with the project's accelerated construction process, since EYA already had worked with the bank on more than 20 other projects.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

As master developer of Chatham Square, EYA worked with the city of Alexandria, ARHA, and Fannie Mae to create a community that would achieve each partner's goals and improve the neighborhood. The project faced monumental development challenges, including a major demolition effort (preceded by a six-month rat abatement process) completed by ARHA; the need to upgrade utilities and put them underground; groundwater issues created by the site's proximity to the Potomac River; historic requirements; the project's density; a tight, sloping infill site in an urban setting; and additional geotechnical issues. Development also included off-site infrastructure improvements to separate an antiquated combined sanitary and stormwater system at a cost of approximately \$1 million.

After demolition was completed, construction began in November 2002 at the northwest corner of the site and proceeded toward the southeast for two reasons: the northern edge of the site was seen as slightly lower in value, due to its location across the street from a bus parking lot; and because of utility constraints, since an underground transformer also is located near the northwest corner. Disciplined cost controls were required to keep the project within budget while responding to the many challenges that arose during the development process.

Tax credit obligations required that all of the public housing units be delivered within two years of receiving funding. The fully integrated design, in turn, necessitated that all of the market-rate townhouses be marketed and constructed within the same time frame. Completing all land development and construction within that time frame called for a phenomenal development and management effort. The first market-rate townhouses and public housing units were delivered in January 2005 and commemorated by a key exchange ceremony between the first market-rate owners and the first public housing residents to move into the new community. More than 200 people attended the ceremony, including city officials and members of Congress. EYA delivered the last of the public housing units—which, by regulation, had to receive certificates of occupancy by December 2005—in September. The project was substantially completed in December 2005; the last few townhouses were delivered in January 2006.

MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT

Successfully marketing luxury townhouses fully integrated with public housing units appeared to pose quite a challenge. But the market was so strong—and the location so much in demand—that EYA had no trouble selling the townhomes. Although EYA originally projected that they would sell for prices lower than those in neighboring projects, actual sales prices were higher than neighboring comparable sales, disproving the common belief that buyers of high-end market-rate housing resist purchasing residences in mixed-income communities.

A full week before the sales office opened in February 2004, dozens of people camped out in line for a chance to purchase a townhouse. As the units sold, EYA gradually raised the prices; the final dwellings sold for as much as \$1.4 million. The higher sales prices resulted in more than \$3 million in additional revenue for ARHA. Investors purchased approximately 10 to 15 percent of the units and a fair number of resales were taking place even as EYA

closed its final sales. Early resales reflected significant appreciation. As the project reached completion in late 2005, EYA was able to maintain a pace of 18 market-rate unit deliveries per month.

Chatham Square homebuyers tend to be empty nesters and young professionals who are attracted to urban rowhouse living. They also tend to be people who are drawn to the social environment being created there.

Before the public housing units were completed, ARHA set up an advisory committee of representatives of ARHA, city staff, public housing residents, local homeowners, faith-based organizations, local universities, and other stakeholders to create applicant selection criteria for Chatham Square and the related BWR Apartments. Priority was given first to those who had been displaced from the Samuel Madden Homes project (defined as “affected residents”); second, to residents in good standing of other ARHA public housing projects; and third, to families on the waiting list for public housing units.

Although all head-of-household applicants (and/or their spouses) are required to have a job (and to have held it for at least three months), affected residents were not subject to minimum income requirements, and first preference was given to families earning 30 to 50 percent of the area median income (AMI). Prospective residents already residing in other public housing are required to have an annual income equal to the minimum wage in effect at the time of certification; all others are required to have incomes between 30 and 50 percent of AMI. Applicants—and all family members—must be willing to attend a resident orientation program, and comply with lease terms and other ARHA requirements. Residents pay rents equal to approximately 30 percent of their adjusted income. Although ARHA does not provide on-site social services, it does offer them at other locations, including its Family Resource Learning Center, which is located about five blocks from Chatham Square.

Developing a homeowners association (HOA) incorporating the needs, voting control, and financial capabilities of both market-rate homeowners and ARHA was a challenge, and conflicts inevitably arose. The HOA is responsible for the maintenance of all common areas, and for enforcing the rules and regulations governing the occupancy of all dwellings in the community. All homeowners pay a monthly HOA fee based on the square footage of their residences; ARHA pays a reduced fee for each of the public housing units because of their smaller size. Although there have been times when ARHA has wanted more of a voice in running the HOA, no major problems have arisen. ARHA does maintain a permanent seat on the HOA board, however.

All of the townhouses have been sold, at an average cost of \$870,000, and all of the rental units are occupied. Chatham Square was extremely profitable, generating returns well in excess of industry averages. The public housing units for which ARHA paid EYA approximately \$217,000 each are now appraised at \$600,000 to \$700,000. Although ARHA cannot sell the units, the agency can leverage its equity in Chatham Square to attract funding for other projects elsewhere in the city. Thus the project continues to contribute to the city’s and the agency’s goals of providing affordable housing for Alexandria’s residents.

EXPERIENCE GAINED

- Chatham Square disproves the common belief that buyers of high-end housing will not purchase homes in mixed-income communities. By transforming a public housing project into a denser community with a lower concentration of poverty and integrating the design with its surroundings, Chatham Square serves as a model for mixed-income redevelopments of public housing.
- Existing public housing residents’ fears that they would be displaced and marginalized by the redevelopment project proved unfounded. In keeping with HOPE VI funding requirements, residents were offered educational opportunities and job training, and many were hired for entry-level construction jobs at the community. Many former residents of Samuel Madden Homes now live at Chatham Square, and several are still employed by EYA and its subcontractors.
- Some prospective public housing residents did not like the designs of the units, which put bedrooms on a second story behind dormer windows, making furniture placement somewhat difficult, and chose to remain in older projects rather than move to Chatham Square.
- The key criteria developed for the project by the city working group required EYA to set aside 25 percent open space. EYA Principal Bob Youngentob, in hindsight, feels that his firm should have challenged this

requirement, and either incorporated less open space or designed such space differently. In particular, the requirement to provide tot lots has proved problematic, as the small playgrounds included in the project are rarely (if ever) used by young children, and have instead become hangouts for young adults who do not live at Chatham Square. A single, larger public park, Youngentob now feels, would have been more manageable and more secure, and it would have been better, in retrospect, for EYA to have been allowed to donate funds toward the development or expansion of a playground on an adjacent site, rather than to put smaller, often misused tot lots right outside Chatham Square residents' front doors. EYA and ARHA are applying this—and other lessons learned at Chatham Square—to other projects on which they are collaborating.

PROJECT DATA

LAND USE INFORMATION

Site area (acres/hectares): 4.16/1.68
 Percentage complete: 100
 Gross density (units per acre/hectare): 34/84
 Number of off-street parking spaces: 272

LAND USE PLAN

Use	Area (Acres/Hectares)	Percentage of Site
Buildings	2.24/0.91	54
Streets/surface parking	1/0.41	24
Landscaping/open space	0.92/0.36	22*
Total	4.16/1.68	100

*Does not include rooftop terraces and decks.

RESIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Market-Rate Townhomes*

Unit Type	Number of Units	Area (Square Feet/Square Meters)	Percentage Sold	Initial Sales Prices
Fayette	16	1,977/184	100	\$525,000–\$675,000
Gibbon	16	1,939/180	100	\$550,000–\$700,000
Jefferson	40	2,170/202	100	\$700,000–\$1,060,000
Pendleton	20	2,151/200	100	\$700,000–\$1,000,000
Royal	4	3,621/336	100	\$1,100,000–\$1,425,000
Madison	4	2,587/240	100	\$800,000–\$1,100,000

*All have three bedrooms and two bathrooms.

Public Housing Units**

Unit Type	Number of Units	Area (Square Feet/Square Meters)	Percentage Leased
Two bedrooms, one bathroom	4	972/90	100
Two bedrooms, 1.5 bathrooms	16	1,247/116	100
Two bedrooms, 1.5 bathrooms, handicapped accessible	6	1,332/124	100

Three bedrooms, two bathrooms	8	1,387/129	100
Three bedrooms, two bathrooms	2	1,332/124	100
Three bedrooms, two bathrooms	16	1,457/135	100

**Public housing residents pay rents equivalent to 30 percent of their adjusted income.

DEVELOPMENT COST INFORMATION

Site Acquisition Cost: \$8,117,219

Site Improvement Costs: \$8,799,485

Excavation/grading: \$1,233,281

Sewer/water/drainage: \$2,554,773

Paving/curbs/sidewalks: \$1,179,014

Landscaping/irrigation: \$162,306

Fees/general conditions: \$3,670,111

Construction Costs: \$28,161,000

Soft Costs: \$10,418,646

Architecture/engineering: \$1,199,444

Project management: \$1,015,520

Marketing: \$770,083

Legal/accounting: \$555,208

Taxes/insurance: \$758,276

Title fees: \$3,933,330

Construction interest and fees: \$761,751

Other: \$1,425,034

Total Development Cost: \$55,496,350

DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

Planning started: July 2002

Construction started: November 2003

Site purchased: January 2004

Sales/leasing started: February 2004

Project completed: December 2005

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

From Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport: Take George Washington Parkway south. After a little over two miles (3.2 kilometers), turn left on Pendleton Street. The Chatham Square community begins at the corner of Pendleton and North Pitt and extends to Princess and North Royal streets.

Driving time: Ten minutes in nonpeak traffic.

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Chatham Square is a HUD HOPE VI project that lies near the historic district of Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, located across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C.



Photo by Boris Feldbljum

This two-block project mixes 100 high-end for-sale townhouses with 52 public housing rental units that are designed to be indistinguishable from the market-rate residences.



Photo by Cameron Cassidon

Chatham Square was developed through a public/private partnership between developer EYA, the city of Alexandria, the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA), Fannie Mae, and HUD.



The site was formerly occupied by Samuel Madden Homes, a deteriorated two-story, 100-unit public housing project built in the 1940s.



Photo by Cameron Davidson

Most of the market-rate units comprise three bedrooms and two bathrooms, while the public housing apartments have two or three bedrooms and one, 1.5, or two bathrooms arranged in a variety of configurations.



Photo by Boris Feldtbyum

Parking for all units is accessible through alleys that lead either to individual garages for some units or to underground parking for other units.

Chatham Square features 100 market rate townhomes and 52 affordable rental homes architecturally integrated within one cohesive neighborhood

Chatham Square is a mixed income community being developed under the Hope VI program. The goal of the program is to build new communities through the demolition of distressed public housing and replacement with new, mixed-income communities with higher quality homes, strong community management, and enhanced social services. Chatham Square includes 100 market rate townhomes and 52 affordable rental townhomes, all architecturally integrated within one cohesive neighborhood. This is accomplished through the following means:

- Eight mixed-income buildings with ten homes each are seamlessly integrated throughout the community
- Each mixed-income building includes four market rate townhomes, two ground floor, handicap accessible affordable rental homes, and four affordable rental townhomes
- Each market rate townhome includes two parking spaces with direct unit access in a parking garage, while nine parking spaces and additional street parking are reserved for the affordable rental homes
- The Homeowners Association will be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of all common areas and enforce the rules and regulations governing the use and occupancy of all homes in the community

Eakin Youngentob
ASSOCIATES, INC.

Courtesy of EYA

Marketing materials from EYA show how the flats are arranged to resemble the market-rate townhouses.



Chatham Square site plan.