

Adapting to residents' work-at-home needs

Residents are driving demand for business support services in apartment communities as the increasing number of work-from-home residents creates new pressures on owners, managers, and developers for business accommodations, according to Amy Zuckerman, writing in *Multifamily Executive*.

Accommodations can include street-accessible entrances that lead to unit-based workspaces, group work areas, increased Wi-Fi bandwidth, as well as different unit layouts that appeal to different types of at-home businesses. For example, an architect or artist could require substantial open space and light, whereas a massage therapist or photographer might need light-blocking capabilities. Caterers, computer program designers, writers, graphics artists, tutors, marketing and financial advisors, professors and many others are shifting their work locations to their homes and seeking apartment buildings that cater to their specific business needs.

These are people who may desire a multilevel unit that provides a professional space that is securely segregated from their living space, and they come in all ages—boomers not yet ready to retire, Gen Xers who continue to drift “off grid,” and millennials who are seeking the perfect work/life balance. Apartment developers and owners who can offer the right blend of personal living, personal work, community living and community work spaces will have the upper hand in attracting the at-home workforce.

While there is much owners and developers can do to create spaces that appeal to the new work-at-home resident niche, it may also be important to give residents more rein so they can alter their units to suit their particular needs. Building that flexibility into your lease and your property insurance is a key consideration, as is clarifying who insures what and who makes sure changes are to code.

When you create a work-from-home apartment setting, you will also need to consider safety, hours of operation, noise limits, liability for damage done to your property by business visitors, and your liability should any of your business systems fail (think of your equipment failures that damage food businesses or utility outages you cause that lead to residents' business income loss). There are numerous examples of problems with your systems that could harm residents' work projects, so develop a liability risk plan that minimizes your exposure for lost income or property damage to their businesses.

If you really want to be on the cutting edge, consider creating an area on your grounds where businesspeople can congregate during the day or night and where they can hold private events for their business colleagues. Some commercial residential property owners are even modulating portions of their buildings to form micro units that function similarly to dormitories—private mini-living spaces that feed into shared kitchens, reading areas, gardens and libraries. It all depends on the vibe you want to create and the niche you want to attract. One thing is for sure, those who base their design creativity in an understanding of the work-from-home culture will set the trend for competition in the multiunit residential industry.

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