

Project planners turn to using the great outdoors

By Jane Adler

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Amid growing evidence that a simple stroll outdoors improves mental and physical health, the outside environment is taking center stage at new projects for older people.

Many active-adult developments feature walking trails, tennis courts and golf courses.

Buildings meant for those who are less active often include outdoor gardens and terraces. And landscapes are carefully designed to provide scenic views.

Two outdoor areas are the focus at the Mather, a new \$200 million retirement project in downtown Evanston where the first of two new high-rises is under way. Two-thirds of the site that straddles Davis Street will be green space.

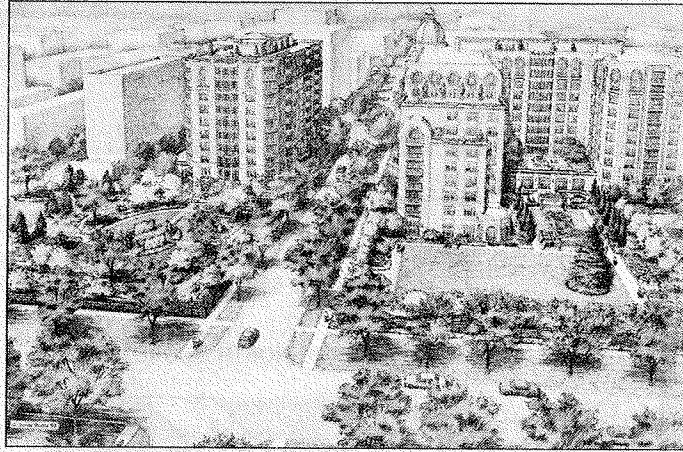
It features formal gardens where residents can sit and stroll, as well as working gardens for residents to grow plants and vegetables.

"The gardens help to extend the common areas of the building and provide a space for more activities," said Mary Leary, president and chief executive at project developer Mather Life-Ways, a non-profit group based in Evanston that operates several retirement communities.

The gardens also will be used for concerts, picnics, parties and other events that will be open to the community.

Research shows that older people appreciate the outdoors, according to Susan Rodiek, a professor at Texas A&M University.

Being outside also provides a view of the wider world, Rodiek added. "Residents of retirement buildings do not want to feel cut off." Time spent outdoors improves health too, Rodiek said. Also, "exposure to light can help balance hormones and may decrease depression," she said. Interestingly, Rodiek's research has found



Construction is under way on the first of two new high-rises at The Mather, a \$200 million retirement project in downtown Evanston. Two-thirds of the site will be green space.

that the desire for contact with the outdoors increases with age. She's studying older people in Chicago, Houston and Seattle.

The outdoor environment is a key element at Stonebridge of Lake Bluff, a new age-restricted development under way in the northern suburb. The project is being built just west of Green Bay Road on 47 acres of an estate from the 1900s. The development will include 12 acres of woods and about 70 new homes. The property also includes a manor house and gate house.

The homes will be clustered around a road that winds through the property, said Bernard Jacobs, partner at Jacobs/Ryan Associates, the project's Chicago-based landscape architect. Even the road has been carefully designed as a kind of country lane. "The road is scaled to the project," said Jacobs.

Six interconnecting ponds planted with natural vegetation will create "a prairie river," visible from the back terrace of the homes.

Project developer Chris Rintz, of Skokie-based New England Builders, said, "The project is the antithesis of condo living. Not everyone wants to give up their yard and move downtown to an apartment where they are stacked on top of 100 other

people." Four model homes at Stonebridge should be open in 60 days, he added.

Just as at other age-restricted projects, the homeowners association at Stonebridge will handle landscape maintenance. Most older people who move are not looking for more yard work. The houses also are on small lots to provide more open space. There will be no fences to obstruct views.

Other local projects maximize open space, which is close to the homes at the Carillon developments by Cambridge Homes. "People need a place for exercise and relaxation," said Amy Wilson, associate designer at Pugsley & LaHaie, the landscape architecture firm for Carillon.

At Carillon, open space has a "meadow" look, Wilson said. Expanses of grassy areas are punctuated with ornamental and shade trees. It's very natural, green, and it's low maintenance, said Wilson. "That's what residents are looking for."

Jane Adler is a Chicago-area freelance writer. Write to her at Senior Housing, c/o Chicago Tribune Real Estate, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611. Or e-mail real estate@tribune.com. Sorry, she cannot make personal replies. Answers will be supplied only through the paper.