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## City of Brookfield on fast pace toward reaching consultant's apartment projection



*Developers recently presented revamped plans for The Reserve to the city that call for repurposing of an empty parcel of the Bishops Woods office park to create 194 residences. Photo By Michael Campbell*



By Geoff Bruce  
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Last November, a consultant for the city of Brookfield estimated that by 2020, the community would need between 500 and 700 new apartments.

Less than six months later, the low end of that range is already on the track to fruition.

The study, put together by Gruen Gruen + Associates, made the prediction based on projected growth in the city over the next five years.

City Director of Community Development Dan Ertl noted that the number presented by the city's consultant was a projected demand, not a cap on what officials should consider.

"That was not a calculated threshold," Ertl said. "The point was to place in context the forecast of demand so that elected officials have that as a frame of reference to consider when projects are in front of them."

### Quick pace

Regardless, the low end of that projection has already nearly been met.

Ertl noted that several projects previously proposed in the city are already under construction, such as Hidden Lake Preserve on Burleigh Road, Brookfield Junction II in the Village Area and Lilly Preserve near Brookfield East High School.

Three projects that have already been considered by city staff and officials this year amount to a total of 485 future apartments that Ertl said would qualify toward the figure provided by Gruen.

The Gruen figures referred to "market rate" apartments, which differ from other kinds of multifamily housing, Ertl explained.

"There's senior housing, which is not market rate, there's also assisted living for seniors, memory care for those with dementia and other illnesses and there's condominiums," he said.

While multifamily residences in general remain on the rise in today's housing market, Ertl's distinction differentiates developments such as The Glen at Woodside Creek, which will bring 76 new condos to the city.

The projects that have been discussed in recent weeks are a pair of Wimmer Communities projects and The Reserve, being built by Atlanta-based Campbell Capital Group LLC.

The Reserve was originally proposed in 2014; however, developers only recently returned to city officials with revamped plans. The project calls for the repurposing of an empty parcel of the Bishops Woods office park off West Bluemound Road and would create 194 residences.

Wimmer Communities, based out of Hales Corners, introduced two projects to the city's plan commission earlier this month that would equal 291 market-rate apartments.

The Artisan and The Linx Club, at Wisconsin Avenue and Main Street and near the terminus of Pinehurst Drive, respectively, would be similar in size and scale to Wimmer's last project in the city, Georgetown Square.

### Why all the fuss?

City staff and developers alike have noted that the recent influx of apartment demand is owed to two specific demographics.

"There's a significant movement ... in which there is a demand for high-end, leased residences that is really more of a lifestyle choice as opposed to an economic one," Wimmer Communities President Mark Wimmer said earlier this month. "It's residents of Brookfield who have raised their family and no longer have need of the yard work and the snow clearing and the size of their unit but want to stay within the neighborhood, go to the same churches, go and eat at the same places and have their friends in the area, but are looking to be untethered from the real estate ownership."

The Gruen report found a particular observation in regard to this demographic in the city.

"Brookfield continues to age. The 65-and-older cohort, the segment of the population as part of the overall population pie, has grown to 21 percent, from only 12 percent in 1990," Ertl said. "As people age, some wish to consider different housing lifestyle choices."

In addition to empty nesters and senior citizens, apartments are also appealing options for young professionals or millennials who, as a demographic, have tended to stay away from residential ownership.

The Gruen report found that Brookfield has a higher-than-average jobs-to-household ratio, with 2.7 workers per household.

"That is a pretty significant statement. That means that there's more income per household than maybe other communities," Ertl said. "If you have more income per household, some of those people who live in the home, such as children or millennials, they may choose to move out of the basement, move out of their bedrooms and make the choice to rent."

Ertl also noted another detail in the report that makes developing rental units in the city appealing to Wimmer, Campbell and their peers.

"(Gruen) found that Brookfield continues to secure higher rents than other communities in the region," Ertl said.

According to the report, newer single bedroom apartments in Brookfield on average rent for \$1,200 to \$1,300 a month, and even older units command rents of at least \$1,100.

"Asking monthly rents in Brookfield for apartment units are generally in the \$1.40 to \$1.48 per square foot range," the report said.



### Allowing apartments

One issue that has come up with recent projects is the disagreement between the historical appearance of Brookfield and the contrasting proposals of large apartment complexes.

For a number of projects approved in recent years, including Hidden Lake Preserve, Lilly Preserve and now The Reserve,