



Miami Brickell highrise tower with recreational amenities area. Credit: Felix Mizioznikov/Adobe Stock.

A Pool and Gym Won't Cut It: Developers Are Upping Their Game on Amenities to Stay Competitive in South Florida

"We've never seen this influx of need for alcohol licensing," one hospitality attorney said.

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Competition is fierce among multifamily developers as the influx of residents to South Florida is motivating them to attract tenants with community-building amenities. Developers are adjusting their approaches accordingly, with many exploring alcohol licenses—something normally only seen in commercial real estate.

About 25% of surveyed renters said they left an apartment to find better apartment amenities and about one-fifth wanted improved community amenities in general. That's according to the 2022 National Multifamily Housing Council/Grace Hill Renter Preferences Survey Report.

The typical pool and gym are what tenants have come to expect, but in order to attract tenants, developers now need to think outside of the box to stand out.

Those that don't stay competitive may have a hard time attracting new tenants or even getting construction financing, according to Anthony Kang, a partner with Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr in Miami. That's because lenders now want buildings to have an edge, so that they can be sold or leased quickly and the loans can be repaid.

The main focus is on enhancing common spaces to allow residents to interact more and feel good about working from their buildings, according to Kang.

"I know that buildings now offer classes, they organize holiday events, and they utilize common spaces that are purposely built to be able to host larger gatherings," said Kang. "Some are now hopping on the co-working environment trend as well, where they're doling out spaces with printers and scanners dividers for people to work and interact with each other."

Many developers are hoping to offer areas like community courtyards, which can be used for multiple activities.

"There was some before, but even more so now. There are people building areas for a dog park within a building, or a space for them to wander and socialize. It's in high demand," said Kang.

In his own residence, Kang said he appreciates being able to host events at social spaces such as multiple theaters, game rooms and rooms for hosting catered events.

“Those features are always appealing for residents,” said Kang. “They not only have the gyms but they invite trainers and offer classes, like spin classes and yoga classes and other classes for their residents.”

Alcohol Licenses

Marbet Lewis of alcohol law firm Spiritus Law said she’s seen increased inquiries from developers on liquor licensing options for their buildings since 2020.

“As we saw this huge migration of California and New York residents, demand quickly picked up,” said Lewis. “Having those additional amenities on-site or close by in these communities really became essential. People really don’t want to have to travel too much anymore to get basic necessities and, for many, alcohol is on that list.”

Lewis said many property managers and developers are hoping to include restaurants and lobby bars as amenities. It was a trend that used to only be popular in commercial properties.

“We’ve never seen this influx of need for alcohol licensing,” said Lewis. “The price has at least doubled in most counties and these are your liquor licenses that go to a bar or some smaller restaurant, lounges, or even hotels.”

In light of the rising demand, Lewis said she believes the price for liquor licenses will remain high as migration continues.

“We’re in that phase where a lot of these businesses have finished their due diligence and they’re ready to either break ground, remodel or expand whatever property they’ve acquired, so we’re still very much in that race to find alcohol licenses and complete those transactions,” said Lewis. “We don’t see it dying down. We still have a long list of clients that are waiting for liquor licenses for one reason or another.”

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