

Luxury Apartments Open in Former Industrial Area

Rentals start at AvalonBay's fifth Stamford project.

By ELEANOR CHARLES

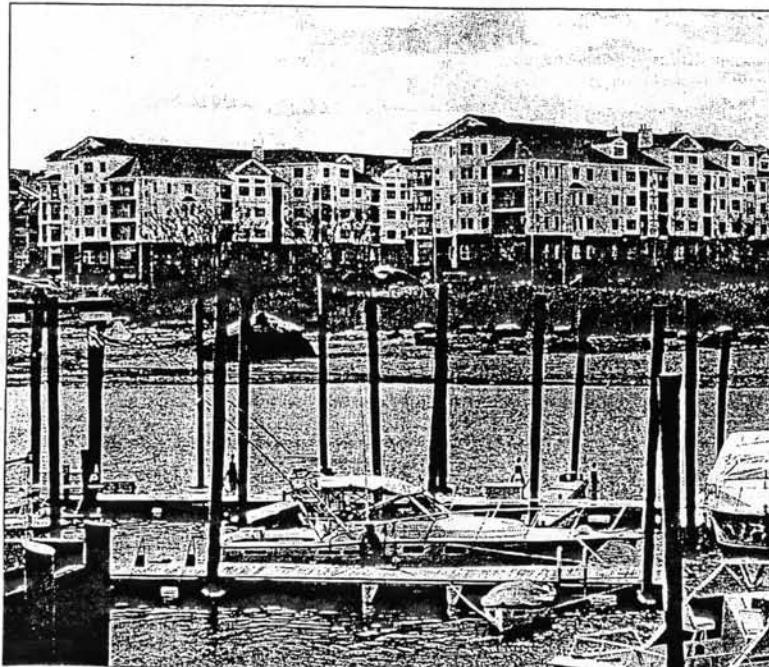
One of the most diverse neighborhoods imaginable lies between the west branch of Stamford harbor and the border of Greenwich between Interstate 95 and Long Island Sound. A vestige of old industrial Stamford called Waterside, it covers a little more than a square mile, into which are crammed small, well-kept working class homes as well as houses that are falling apart; contemporary office buildings and dilapidated old industrial buildings; tumbledown stores and yuppie restaurants, a marina, \$400,000 condominiums, private homes and an affordable housing project called Waterside Green.

Now, a new \$60.7 million neighbor called Avalon Harbor has joined the mix. It becomes the fifth luxury rental housing complex developed in Stamford by AvalonBay Communities and is the first of the company's waterfront projects to have its own marina. This week 23 out of 323 apartments under construction along the waterfront on Southfield Avenue will be available for rent. When the whole project is complete, the number of apartments that AvalonBay Communities has developed in the city will total 1,544.

Twelve apartments at Avalon Harbor have been released, and 12 more will become available weekly through September, when the two U-shaped four-story buildings are expected to be completed. Rents for 560- to 860-square-foot studios will be \$1,425 to \$1,900, while one- to three-bedroom apartments of 832 to 1,850 square feet will rent for \$1,915 to \$4,300.

Avalon Harbor is the latest step in Waterside's 30-year stroll toward its current state of semi-gentrification. The transformation began on 42 pristine acres at its southernmost tip, where Dolphin Cove was developed by Barry Montgomery in the 1970's — the first and for a long time the only luxury development south of the railroad tracks. What many observers thought was sheer folly at the time contains 100 private homes, each worth well over \$1 million, along with 600,000 square feet of offices in 15 buildings.

Now, with little land available for new building, developers are finding it worthwhile to remediate and redevelop Waterside's aged, abandoned industrial sites. Avalon Harbor is being built on 15 acres abutting Southfield Park. Three acres of the site were once owned by Northeast Utilities, and



George Ruhe for The New York Times

At Avalon Harbor, the first 23 units will be available for rent this week.

the Hoffman Fuel Company's six huge oil tanks stood on the remaining 12 acres. Oil was delivered by barges and stored there until it was loaded into tanker trucks for dispersal to customers.

Nearby on Southfield Avenue, there is Stamford Landing, containing two office buildings, 88 condominiums, two restaurants, a boardwalk cafe and marina built in 1985 on land that had held a chocolate factory and more oil tanks.

On Selleck Street the derelict Global Meat-Slicing Machine and Plating Company, vacant for 20 years, is being demolished and its five-acre lot is to be remediated by Mathew Kenny, head of Global Development Enterprises L.L.C. "We are looking for anchor tenants for a 55,000-square-foot building that could accommodate offices and research and development companies," he said.

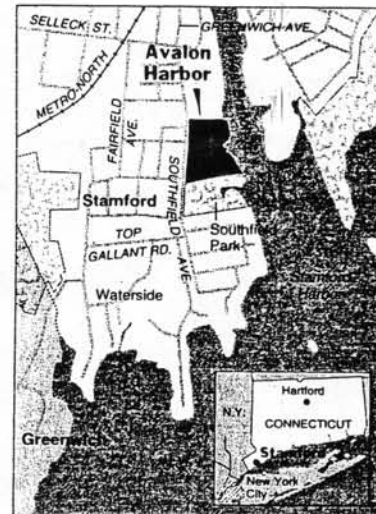
While the extraordinary diversity of Waterside might be expected to produce conflict among neighbors, it hasn't. Instead, "around four years ago an organization of residents called the Waterside Coalition was formed," said Ralph Loomis, president of the Stamford Partnership, a quasi-public organization dedicated to improving the quality of life by bringing various constitu-

encies together. "One of the first things they dealt with was what is now Avalon Harbor," he said.

It was then a plan designed by the architect Do Chung for Seth Weinstein and Charles Mallory, chairman and president, respectively, of the Clearview Management Corporation, for a nine-story hotel, a nine-story condominium and a five-story office and retail building. But, Mr. Weinstein said, "the community didn't want the height and didn't want any commercial development. They already felt impacted by traffic at the Stamford Landing offices and noise from the restaurants at night."

AVALON approached Mr. Weinstein and signed a contract with Clearview in 1998, acquiring an option to purchase the property eventually. Do Chung redesigned the concept of the project after consulting with Avalon and Clearview, and Niles Bolton & Associates was the architect of record. "Once Seth got city approvals based on the new designs and the contamination was cleaned up, we exercised our option to buy it," said Paxton Kinol, senior development director for AvalonBay.

Clearview's partners said it was in their best interest to sell rather than build the



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project themselves. "They made an offer that quite frankly we couldn't refuse," Mr. Weinstein said. "We had spent a lot of money, including \$2.5 million on environmental remediation, and there was no opposition from the public. They were glad to be rid of the oil tanks." The deal closed in 2000.

Each of the 12 apartment models has a kitchen with appliances, full-sized washer-dryer, wall-to-wall carpeting, walk-in closet and a large soaking tub in the bathroom. Of the models, 11 have lofts, and 10 have lofts and large storage rooms. Like most Avalon complexes, this one will provide a number of free amenities for its residents: a heated swimming pool, exercise room, indoor basketball and racquetball courts, a business center with three computers, printer and fax; a conference room, billiard room, clubhouse and kitchen. Less typical amenities include a barbecue area and a 12-foot-wide waterfront boardwalk with two fishing piers and a 68-slip marina.

Under an agreement with the city, the slips available for rent will be divided equally between tenants and the public. Fees are tentatively set at \$95 a foot per season, based on whichever is longer, the boat or the slip. Slip sizes have not yet been determined.

Each apartment will have one free parking space in the 400-car basement garage. An additional 200 outdoor spaces will help accommodate tenants, who will be charged monthly fees between \$40 outdoors and \$75 indoors to park each additional car. Twenty free outdoor spaces will be set aside for members of the public using the marina or boardwalk.

Foreseeing a problem when Avalon Har-

bor is fully leased and generating a substantial increase in traffic, Thomas Bruccoleri, Stamford's transportation planner, said, "We've put out a request for consultants to suggest solutions." He said, "We're not envisioning taking property for widening the road," referring to the long-established line of small homes that face Avalon Harbor and Stamford Landing across Southfield Avenue.

The focus is on improvements at the shabby and unsafe intersection of Southfield Avenue, Greenwich Avenue and Selleck Street, he said. The city plans to create an attractive gateway to the area and improve traffic flow and safety by adding a second left-hand turn at the corner of Southfield Avenue and Selleck Street. The changes will require shaving off small portions of three properties: two vacant houses and a defunct business. In addition, new sidewalks, curbing, trees, street lights and signage will be installed.

Work will begin when a \$250,000 federal grant from the Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program is secured. The balance of the \$475,000 cost will be met by Avalon's contribution of \$150,000 and contributions from the city, the Waterside Coalition and Stamford Partnership.

A second project the city would like to see is a waterfront boardwalk extending unbroken from Stamford Landing through Avalon Harbor. But Marshall's Express Inc., a packaging and trucking company on three acres between the two developments has a problem. "They are restricted from giving up space due to the size of their trucks," said Mr. Bruccoleri, "so we're looking at hugging the edge of their property and possibly extending the boardwalk partially over the water."

A major new proposal that would add markedly to the redevelopment of the West Branch is to be submitted to Stamford's planning and zoning boards in April by Arthur Collins, a developer of large mixed-use waterfront properties in Greenwich and Stamford.

The project would transform a former 40-acre Northeast Utilities site facing Avalon Harbor and Stamford Landing across the waters of the West Branch into a complex of 620 luxury condominiums, 275,000 square feet of offices and a ferry terminal. Ten percent of the condominiums would be set aside for low-income tenants. The development, called Admiral's Wharf, would be combined with the existing 300 slips and the boatyard at Brewer's Yacht Haven Marina. Public hearings on the proposal are to be held late in the spring.

"Gentrification can be expected," said Robin Stein, Stamford's land use planner, "but it will take a long time."