

The Virginian-Pilot

A look inside the former Virginian-Pilot newsroom as developers invest millions in downtown Norfolk apartment projects

By Trevor Metcalfe

The Virginian-Pilot

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The former home of The Virginian-Pilot newspaper is now the Pilot Place apartment complex. (Stephen M. Katz/The Virginian-Pilot)

Downtown Norfolk is having a moment.

Several local and regional developers are investing millions of dollars in apartment projects in the Neon District and downtown, including at the former Virginian-Pilot building.

Pilot Place transforms historic headquarters

For 83 years, 150 W. Brambleton Ave. was the headquarters of South Hampton Roads' newspaper operations. Now, the space contains 180 high-end apartments with several nods to its historic past.

The Monument Cos., a Richmond developer with several projects in Hampton Roads, [bought the building](#) for \$9.5 million in 2020 and said it spent another \$30 million on renovations.

The complex, called Pilot Place, is two structures. Ten units are located in the annex building, which had housed publications such as Inside Business. That building also has 5,653 square feet of commercial space. The other 170 units are in the five-story main building.

The apartments include studios and one-, two- and three-bedroom units. Monthly rent ranges from \$1,289 to \$2,599. The developer said about 72% of the apartments were leased as of April 4.

“There’s been great interest,” said Sally Craighill, Monument senior operations manager.



The main lobby of Pilot Place used to be The Virginian-Pilot's advertising department. (Stephen M. Katz/The Virginian-Pilot)

In addition to the original elevators and stairways, nods to the building's past are most apparent in the lobby and coworking space in the old advertising offices in the front of the building. The entranceway still shows the Thomas Jefferson quote, "The press is the best instrument for enlightening the mind of man."

Beyond the entranceway, the space includes a historic Linotype machine and a large Virginian-Pilot sign.

The rest of the building twists, turns and winds its way through a mezzanine and four other floors of apartments, including several loft units. A former delivery space opens up into a pool and patio area, and there's gym is near the lobby.

"The building itself was a huge challenge," said Tom Dickey, Monument principal and co-founder.

Former Pilot reporter Joanne Kimberlin describes the building as a "[built-onto, cobbled-together Frankenstein of a complex.](#)" The half floors and various construction methods used for the additions — steel to concrete and back again — were very challenging for crews, Dickey said.

He's still proud of the work they accomplished.

"It was a really neat project," Dickey said.



The rooftop outdoor spaces for fifth-floor apartments at Norfolk's new Pilot Place apartment complex. (Stephen M. Katz/The Virginian-Pilot)

Two Marathon projects take shape

Two apartment developments from Frank "Buddy" Gadams' Marathon Development Group are under construction in the downtown area.

Next to the Icon apartment building, Gravity at 400 is a \$45.8 million development with 273 units. Also, right down the street from the Pilot development is Fusion @ NEON, a 250-unit development with an [elevated design](#) to keep the apartments safe from frequent flooding on Olney Road. Gravity is expected to be completed in September 2023, and Fusion should finish up in July 2023, project leaders said during a presentation to the Downtown Norfolk Council.

Building on the waterfront

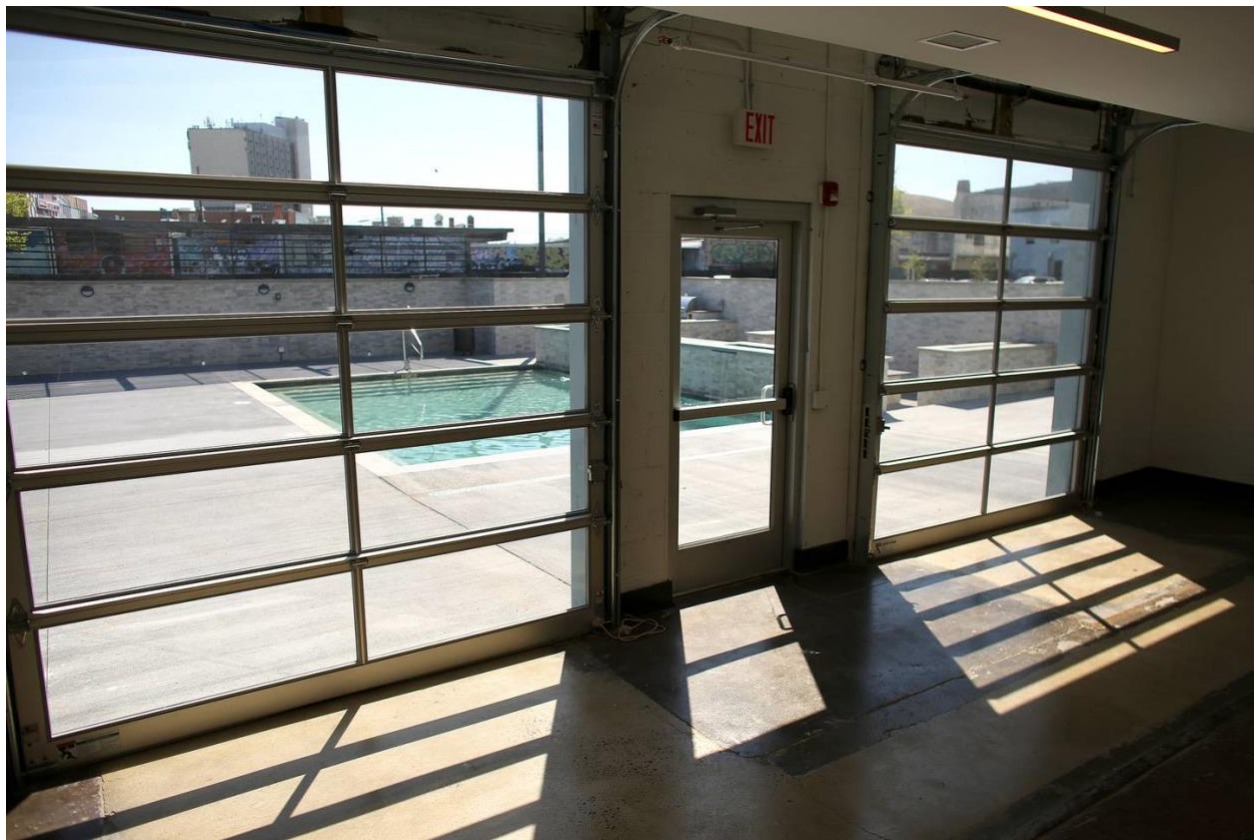
The Breeden Co. is now leasing at its \$70 million, 258-unit development along the Elizabeth River at Fort Norfolk. Barry Tomlin, Breeden vice president of property management, said the construction teams used their experience developing properties at the Virginia Beach Oceanfront to complete the project.

“This is our first foray into the downtown Norfolk market,” Tomlin said during the April presentation to the Downtown Norfolk Council.

The building is elevated by 779 piles to protect against flooding and sea-level rise. The project includes one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments with rents ranging from \$1,700 to \$2,505 a month, according to the development website.

Construction started in the spring of 2021 and the first resident moved in this month, Tomlin said.

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Pilot Place's outdoor pool can be seen through glass garage doors that once led to The Virginian-Pilot's printing presses. (Stephen M. Katz/The Virginian-Pilot)