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## A new Civic hybrid

*Back Story • Developers see seeds of change in condo-rental mix*

BY PETER KORN

*The Portland Tribune, Sep 11, 2007 (2 Reader comments)*

**Ean Reeves doesn't mind the prostitutes and late-night rowdies who occasionally move up and down West Burnside Street beneath his new condominium. Urban grit is what drew Reeves to his eighth-floor corner unit in the Civic.**



JIM CLARK / TRIBUNE PHOTO

“The reason I bought here was because it was downtown but it wasn't in the Pearl,” says the 33-year-old Reeves, who works for Nautilus in Vancouver, Wash. “I like to be around a more diverse location, even if there are drug dealers or prostitutes.”

And Mark Edlen, one of Portland's most visionary developers, thought he had his market all figured out.

Last year, when Edlen described his large-scale condominium project on West Burnside, he spoke grandly of plans for revitalizing a neighborhood that for decades had resisted improvement.

Bars and fast-food restaurants have dominated West Burnside for years,

The developers of the Civic condos and the attached Morrison apartments may talk about the complex as part of a social experiment that will bring change to West Burnside Street, but new Civic resident Ean Reeves says he likes the neighborhood the way it is, even with a bit of grit.

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many catering to the residents of the \$400-a-month, shared-bathroom hotel rooms that sit above shops on the street.

Nearly 400 new condo owners would change that, Edlen was certain. And not just any condo owners. Edlen and Thomas Cody, in charge of the project for Gerding/Edlen Development Co., decided to build housing that could attract buyers who were not necessarily wealthy, including some who have never owned a home before.

Fifteen of the Civic's condos are priced at under \$200,000, three out of 10 of the Civic's residents are first-time home buyers, and Cody says that he believes many of the new residents earn about \$50,000 a year.

"They're young buyers, and I think they will hit the sidewalk, and I think they will own that neighborhood," Edlen said last September. "Older people walk around the drug dealers. These youngsters will kick them out. I think it will be one of the more interesting social and anthropological experiences in the buildings I've created."

Well, the first wave of residents has been living in the Civic for about two months now, and Reves is one of them. In many ways, he's the property owner Edlen envisioned taking residence in the Civic – young, active (Reves runs and bikes), invested in his new neighborhood.

But if West Burnside and its surrounding area become too "sanitized and cleansed," Reves says, he won't want to stay in his \$429,000 eighth-story corner condo. He likes his new neighborhood just the way it is.

Reves says he knows the area will change. But he knows what he doesn't want to see. "I wouldn't want it to change too much," he says. "Can you develop this area and revitalize it but not turn it into the same cookie-cutter neighborhood that already exists, like the Pearl? That would be my wishful thinking."

But the location of the Civic isn't its greatest risk.

The Civic and the Morrison, an adjoining apartment building that's part of the same project, represent an experiment in Portland housing – market-rate condos and subsidized housing for low-income renters built as one overall scheme.

And Cody and Edlen know that they can't allow the Morrison apartments – which they built but the Housing Authority of Portland will operate – to deteriorate. That's because any failure in the Morrison likely will drive down the value of their condos next door.

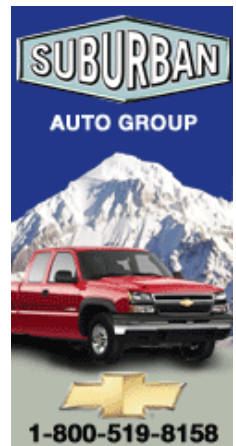
If Edlen's vision of a mixed-income development in a mixed-income neighborhood comes true, he may change the way Portland developers and city officials look at transforming neighborhoods throughout the city.

The Civic and the Morrison share common space, ground-floor retail shops and one parking garage. In Portland, that's a first.

And as an experiment, it intrigues Cody much more than the location of the Civic.

"You're going to have populations colliding," Cody says. "The home buyers, the home renters and the shoppers."

The Civic also is breaking ground as the city's largest development to encourage condo owners not to rely upon their cars. In fact, 24 of the condos have been put on the market with no parking rights – and they've sold. But the limited parking has also provided a way for Gerding/Edlen to save money.

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The Morrison will have 140 units when completed, but its renters get only 25 of the shared parking lot's 400 stalls.

### **Residents plan to get involved**

Rudy Wong and Cassandra Eisele, who have lived for more than a month in the Civic, are just the type of condo owners Cody and Edlen had in mind when they designed the development.

Before moving to their two-bedroom unit with a view of downtown and two reserved parking spaces in the garage (at a price of \$595,000), Wong, 35, lived in the Pearl District and Eisele, 30, in North Portland.

The location immediately attracted Eisele. "You give up being in any one neighborhood, but you're perfectly triangulated between the Pearl, downtown and 23rd," she says. "You get the benefit of all three neighborhoods."

Eisele says she doesn't yet feel comfortable walking their beagle, Rex, alone at night, and Wong says he's noticed the streets around the Civic aren't as clean as they are in the Pearl.

But the couple, soon to marry, doesn't intend to sit back and simply watch their neighborhood. "We're much more interested in getting involved with the community," Wong says. "Because we want to make sure this area becomes what we would like it to be."

Eisele says she likes the idea of the Civic and Morrison side by side. "I think there's something nice about living in a community that's mixed," she says. "That's the real world, and it makes life interesting."

As a group, the new residents of the Civic are more notable for what they have in common than for diversity among their ranks. About 200 people have moved into 130 of the building's 261 condos. Eventually there will be close to 400 residents.

More than 80 percent of the Civic's new residents are between 20 and 40 years of age, with an average age of 33. The heavy majority, 64 percent, are male. Nearly three out of four of the residents are unmarried.

### **Bar doubles up on staff**

A block away and across the street from the Civic, Marathon Taverna bartender Wil Hoehne looks out at West Burnside and says he welcomes the arrival of all the residents of the two new buildings but thinks talk of revitalizing the neighborhood might be premature.

"I really don't think it needs much change," he says.

Hoehne says occasional muggings take place and prostitutes seem to cycle in and out. Most of the bar's regulars are working-class and fixed-income residents of the neighborhood.

But Hoehne says management at the Marathon recently has decided to keep two bartenders on duty every night in anticipation of increased business. Other businesses on Burnside say they're expecting new customers as well.

Sue Abrahamson, Northwest Portland's Neighborhood Response Team officer for the Portland Police Bureau, has been keeping track of the crime situation on West Burnside for nine years.

She says the area around Burnside has more than its share of car prowls and dope deals but that prostitution probably is its most visible crime.

In fact, Abrahamson said, the neighborhood has one of the highest

concentrations of solicitation arrests in the city – in the last two years Portland police have arrested 110 johns in the immediate area.

“Those condos are beautiful, and they’ve got a Burnside view,” Abrahamson says. “They’re going to see so much, and I hope they call (the police). They’re going to have beautiful reality television in front of them on Burnside.”

### **Project may be an anomaly**

Margaret Bax, city housing policy manager, says she would like to see more projects willing to mix market-rate with subsidized housing. “I’m hoping it’s the wave of the future,” she says.

But Bax isn’t optimistic. The Civic came to life because the housing authority owned the property on which both buildings sit. The housing authority’s rundown Civic Apartments were torn down for the project after the housing agency sold the land for the Civic to Gerding/Edlen for \$4.5 million.

As part of the agreement, Gerding/Edlen became the builder of the Morrison. That has allowed Gerding/Edlen to develop both buildings as part of one unified design, from the retail shops to parking garage.

Having one developer design both buildings increases the likelihood that the project will succeed, Cody says. He says the Civic-Morrison complex has been designed and planned so that people in both buildings are encouraged to mix, rather than see one another as belonging to separate social classes. The shared parking garage is one example.

But even given that, Cody says, the success of the development is not assured. Ironically, he believes the financial fate of the venture will not be dependent on the buildings’ location nor the relationship between the people of the two buildings.

Cody says the key will be the ground-floor retail shops, owned by Gerding/Edlen, none of which are open yet. There will be 12 shops, and only two have been leased at this point.

But the right shops, Cody says, will provide mixing areas for the residents of both buildings and lure shoppers from outside, bringing more life to the development. Or not.

“That’s the alchemy, who those tenants are and how they operate,” Cody says. “We will live or die by how we finish the retail.”

### **Many called ‘phony urbanites’**

Not everybody loves the Civic. On a bright Wednesday afternoon, Alma Abrams is standing on what will be Howard’s Way – the pedestrian street between the two buildings – looking up at the Civic. She’s nodding her head side to side, and she doesn’t look happy.

“I wouldn’t live in there if you gave it to me for free,” says Abrams, who lives in the nearby Trinity Place Apartments. She thinks the building is too massive for its location, and she’s not buying the talk of changing the neighborhood.

“You think anybody who’s going to be here is any better than anybody else?” she says.

She’s also not buying that the Civic’s young owners are really going to herald a new urban lifestyle in the neighborhood. “Anything that says urban is a joke,” Abrams says.

She calls many of the Civic's residents "phony urbanites. They will say urban, but they have to have their two SUVs and their 100-pound dog. They're going to get in their Escalades and get out of here when they need to."

Still, Edlen expects the Civic to usher in a new era of development in its neighborhood around PGE Park.

"I think it's similar to the Brewery Blocks (in the Pearl District)," Edlen says of one of his firm's more notable successes. "People were suspicious of whether or not we could pull that off, saying, 'What the heck is somebody trying to do with a new high-rise in this neighborhood?' I think you're going to see a similar impact over the next couple years up there."

Part social experiment, part effort by private developers to help redesign the city, the Civic's future will be looked at closely by the city's other major developers. Yet even Edlen doesn't expect many copycats – not with all the different untested elements of the Civic.

"These are tough deals," he says. "They're not for the faint of heart."

Jerry Powell is chairman of the planning committee for the neighborhood association that represents the area around the Civic. He gives credit to Edlen for taking a chance with the juxtaposition of the two buildings.

"If Mark's right, it will be a great test bed for a lot of new urban development," Powell says. "Planners have been talking about integrating public housing with market housing for 30 years. Until this project, it's been pretty darn hard to realize that discussion."

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