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Affordable Housing Design That Works in NYC: Insights From Aufgang Architects

By [Diana Firtea](#)

Principal Ariel Aufgang on shaping the city's next generation of affordable housing

New York City's multifamily market continues to grapple with a severe housing shortage, where affordability often feels out of reach.

Developers and architects are working together to change that, through both new construction and the preservation of existing communities.

Among the city's most active firms, Aufgang Architects currently has roughly 9,000 multifamily units in its pipeline. In 2024 alone, the firm filed more than 3.3 million square feet of permits, ranking among New York's busiest architectural practices.

From resilient waterfront planning to energy-efficient retrofits, Aufgang's design strategies balance affordability with long-term sustainability. *Multi-Housing News* spoke

with Principal Ariel Aufgang about the [affordable housing trends](#) shaping the city's pipeline and how thoughtful design can foster resilient, community-driven development.

Last year, your firm filed one of the highest number of permits in the city. What does that volume say about where and how affordable housing is moving forward in New York?

Aufgang: We have a healthy mix of new construction and preservation design projects in all five boroughs. This robust pipeline reflects many factors, including the challenges of zoning changes



NIMBYism in certain neighborhoods is still a factor in achieving the density that makes affordable development financially realistic, according to **Aufgang**. *Image courtesy of*

and other land use actions impacting sites that our planning department in many instances has been working on for years.

NIMBYism in certain neighborhoods is still a factor in achieving the density that makes affordable development financially realistic. The growth in our work in [multifamily development](#) results from our strategy of thinking big throughout all phases of the project planning.

Regulations in New York can be complex. How do codes and reviews shape your design process and timelines from the outset?

Aufgang: We are experienced and expert at the highly organized balancing act needed to contend with codes and regulations that often contradict each other... We have to be realistic regarding the often slow bureaucratic process for reviews and approvals.



North Cove Apartments incorporates sustainable building systems and riverfront access features that support long-term livability for residents. *Video courtesy of **Aufgang Architects***

Many New York sites are narrow, irregular or otherwise constrained. Can you share an example of how design adapted to a difficult site?

Aufgang: When confronted with a challenging site, often where others have been stymied, we take creative approaches to solve problems such as steep slopes or unique geometries, noise under airport flight paths or adjacent structures very near the lot lines.

One of our multifamily designs was constructed on a very irregularly shaped lot, requiring acute



Developed by **Tishman Speyer**, 160 Van Cortlandt Park South is an eight-story, 339-unit affordable housing project underway in the Bronx's Kingsbridge neighborhood. The building is being constructed to Enterprise Green Community sustainability standards. *Image by **Aufgang Architects**, courtesy of **Tishman Speyer***

wall angles and tight corners. We specified windows in these corners that allowed more natural light and provided appealing views.

High construction costs are a challenge for everyone involved in the development process. Which recent project shows how you balanced budget limits with high-quality affordable design?

Aufgang: We carefully research innovative materials and new technologies for cutting-edge designs that help meet budgets. Interestingly, in

most instances our designs for affordable multifamily housing utilize materials that are also used in market-rate projects. Also meticulous project management helps assure adherence to construction budgets.

A good example of this is the recently completed North Cove Apartments, a 30-story, 611-unit fully affordable mixed-use building at 375 W. 207th St. along the Harlem River waterfront in Inwood, upper Manhattan, developed by Madd Equities and Joy Construction.

Edgemere Commons is another project you recently completed, one where resiliency played a central role. How did storm-risk planning influence the site design there?

Aufgang: Mitigating flood risk was among the environmental issues that were a priority in our urban planning and design of Edgemere Commons, a new 100 percent affordable mixed-use [community developed by Tishman Speyer](#) on a 9.3-acre site facing the Atlantic Ocean beachfront in the Far Rockaway section of Queens. Our flood mitigation strategy involved raising the intersection of two interior streets several feet higher than the flood plain.

The higher road grade was built over large cisterns we designed as part of a storm water resiliency system that also includes bioswales, vegetated channels for water runoff. The buildings we designed in Edgemere Commons have standby electrical generators located above

the high water level emergency electrical outlets in each unit. We included cooling rooms on each floor for resident comfort should the power go out during extreme heatwaves.

Supportive and senior housing are also a big part of your portfolio. Which design elements directly respond to the needs of these residents?

Aufgang: Our supportive and senior housing designs include extra electrical outlets in kitchens that exceed code requirements to accommodate medical and health equipment. We specify areas for residents to go to on every floor with emergency power for cooling or heating in case electricity goes out.



Edgemere Commons A2, a 244-unit fully affordable building at 337 Beach 52nd St. in Queens, is part of the first block of the larger Edgemere Commons neighborhood. The project includes 73 supportive-housing units, ground-floor retail and a sky deck with ocean views. *Rendering courtesy of **Aufgang***

There is also dedicated office space in the buildings for providers of supportive services, which have separate, discrete access to maintain the privacy of their clients.

Many of your buildings mix housing with community spaces such as worship areas or nonprofit offices. What architectural strategies make these uses coexist successfully?

Aufgang: Our designs specify distinct identities for worship spaces, residential areas and offices, with separate entrances to religious facilities and soundproofing to isolate them audibly for the comfort of the residents ...

Looking ahead, which upcoming projects do you expect will set new benchmarks for affordable housing design in the city?

Aufgang: The adaptive reuse of the huge, landmarked Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx includes new construction of an adjacent 450-unit affordable multifamily tower built to [Passive House standards](#) that will set new benchmarks for affordable housing.

These include access to extensive commercial, educational and recreational facilities open to the public in the repurposed Armory—designed by Aufgang and our partners at FX Collaborative—and proximity to public transportation. This improves the quality of life for residents of that neighborhood, in addition to making it a destination.



Brownsville Arts Center & Apartments, a \$254 million mixed-use development at 366 Rockaway Ave. in Brooklyn's Brownsville neighborhood, will feature 283 affordable homes and a 28,000-square-foot arts center. The all-electric project is slated for completion in 2027. *Rendering courtesy of Gilbane Development*