

April 20, 2008

At a Pair of Gigantic Apartment Complexes, a Planting Project to Match

By [VINCENT M. MALLOZZI](#)

Ten thousand more trees will soon be growing in Manhattan. Give or take one or two.

Their roots will settle in the grounds of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, the sprawling complexes that stretch for almost 10 blocks northeast of 14th Street near the East River, in one of the largest landscaping overhauls in Manhattan's history.

"When this project is complete," said Erik Pauzé, the lead gardener, "we will have landscaped 60 of the 80 acres that make up these two properties."

The project was undertaken by Tishman Speyer, the developer that bought the two apartment complexes from MetLife in October 2006, for \$5.4 billion.

The work began this month and the target date for its completion is June 30, giving it an urgency that brings dozens of gardeners to the neighborhood.

"On any given day, we might have 120 people here, gardening, installing flowers, trees and sprinkler systems," Mr. Pauzé said.

The daunting task involves 200,000 plants — including 10,000 trees, 3,123 shrubs and 120,906 perennials. It is 20 percent complete, with healthy dogwood and cherry trees already sprouting buds. Truckloads of canopy trees, perennials and shrubs will be delivered in the coming weeks.

The project is the creation of Peter Walker and Partners, a landscape architecture firm based in Berkeley, Calif.

"This is probably the largest planting project we have ever done," Mr. Walker said. "Tishman Speyer already had quite a remarkable piece of real estate, but they brought us in to raise the bar by transforming the grounds and making the place look even more stunning."

Combined, Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village comprise 110 buildings, each 13 or 14 stories, that stretch from 14th Street to 23rd Street, between First Avenue and Avenue C.

On Thursday, Carole Jurman, 64, sat on a shade-covered bench in Stuyvesant Town and watched several gardeners go about the business of beautifying the place she has called home for the past 37 years. Since Tishman Speyer bought the properties, rent increases, Ms. Jurman said, have forced some of the 25,000 residents, including several of her longtime friends and neighbors, to pack up and leave.

Ms. Jurman said that while she was “thrilled to see all the wonderful planting,” she was saddened that so many families had to move, and that they will not be around to smell the roses, not to mention the magnolias and skip laurels, when they bloom.

“I feel bad for all of them,” said Ms. Jurman, who lives in a rent-stabilized apartment but would not reveal how much she paid. “There’s almost no place left for middle-class families to live in New York. It’s a terrible situation.”

George R. Hatzmann, a managing director of Tishman Speyer who is overseeing the landscape project, said, “Rent increases are a part of life in the city, but we do our best to stay consistent with market prices.”

Mr. Hatzmann said that 40,000 annuals and 100 hanging flower baskets would be in place by May 11, Mother’s Day. But he would not divulge the amount of money that Tishman Speyer is spending on the project.

“It’s a significant price, but it’s well worth it because it enhances quality of life and makes this a better place to live,” he said during a walking tour on Thursday. “It’s a great way to enhance the look of the property for the people who live here, and for people who might live here in the future.”

Dr. Bianca Alfonso, 35, who practices internal medicine at nearby [Beth Israel Medical Center](#), moved into a two-bedroom apartment in Stuyvesant Town last year. She, too, declined to reveal how much rent she paid, but called her new neighborhood “the best-kept secret in New York.”

“It’s really the best of both worlds,” said Dr. Alfonso, who is married with two small children. “Once you’re in here, surrounded by all of the parks and the beautiful landscaping, you feel as though you’re living in the suburbs. But when it’s time to go to work, you just step outside, and you’re back in busy downtown Manhattan.”

Matthew Donham, an associate landscape architect, said that “one of the biggest challenges regarding this project is making sure that whatever we plant in large masses holds up against the scale of these buildings.”

Mr. Donham stopped to point out a spot in Stuyvesant Town where double rows of oak trees would soon be planted. “Depth and contrast with different sized plants and an assortment of colors is what works best on the eye,” he said.

He said that the enormity of the project meant his company had to buy stock from nurseries across the country. The ginkgo and sweet gum trees, for example, came from Oregon.

“We made a lot of nurseries very happy,” Mr. Donham said.

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