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## How Belmont Village is Solving the Urban Development Puzzle

July 18, 2016 by [Mary Kate Nelson](#) 4 37 [Comments \(0\)](#)



Come fall 2018, locals in Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood may start doing double takes when passing Belmont Village Senior Living’s new community.

That’s because the soon-to-be built, 160-bed Belmont Village Lincoln Park community will very closely resemble a historic building they have seen before. In fact, the exterior of the assisted living and memory care community will be modeled almost exactly after the building razed to make room for it.

In recent years, various senior living companies have realized the benefits of building communities that [fit into their surroundings](#) from an architectural point of view—whether that means building stucco-walled communities in the American Southwest or high rise communities in large, urban cities. In Lincoln Park, Houston-based Belmont Village Senior Living is taking this idea one step further, more or less completely copying the building that once stood on the very same lot.

The strategy seems to be working out for everyone involved, according to Tom Daly, Belmont Village Senior Living’s in-house architect.

“It’s a win-win in Lincoln Park for us,” Daly tells Senior Housing News.

Daly is part of a two-person team at Belmont Village whose responsibilities involve making sure new buildings conform to Belmont Village’s standards, both operationally and aesthetically.

“When we build new communities, we pay a lot of attention to the urban context and the part of the country that we’re in,” Daly says. “We like our communities to feel at home in the cities where we’re building. We don’t want to put tile roofs and stucco walls in Chicago, and we don’t want to put stainless steel and neon in Los Angeles.”

**Same look with ‘senior-friendly dimensions’**

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Belmont Village's community in Lincoln Park will be part of the larger Lincoln Commons mixed-use development built on the former site of Children's Memorial Hospital. Before striking a deal and approving the project, the City of Chicago made the Lincoln Commons co-developers, McCaffery Interests and Hines, promise to retain the facades of several buildings within Lincoln Commons, Daly explains.

The Nellie Black building—the on-site building purchased for use by Belmont Village—was built in the Renaissance Revival style in 1932 to house nurses and hospital interns, according to Preservation Chicago. The only problem: the building, as it was originally built, was too narrow to be a senior living community, and the first floor of the building was six feet above the street.

"It would have been hugely inefficient for us to use existing building," Daly says.

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To comply with the City of Chicago's wishes, Belmont Village resolved to tear down the Nellie Black building and "re-create it in senior-friendly dimensions," Daly explains. This means that, from the outside, the new building will look very much the same as the old building, down to the smallest details.

Construction on Belmont Village Lincoln Park is scheduled to start in the first quarter of 2017, and the building is expected to be completed in the fourth quarter of 2018. Belmont Village will operate the community, which is owned by private equity firm Harrison Street Real Estate Capital LLC.

Lincoln Commons, when completed, will have two 19-story luxury apartment buildings with a total of 540 units, up to 60 low-rise condominiums, and about 160,000 square feet of commercial and retail space.

Building on challenging real estate like the Lincoln Park site is like a puzzle she is excited to solve, Belmont Village Co-Founder and CEO Patricia Will tells Senior Housing News. Will's appetite for solving these puzzles may make Belmont Village a model for other companies serving urban populations; in addition to the Chicago project, Belmont Village is involved in an innovative community in [Mexico City](#) that will be in the same building as a hotel.

### Long, winding road

The process of developing or re-developing in urban areas is often long and arduous, McCaffery Interests President Dan McCaffery said in a April 2014 [interview](#) with Chicago Magazine.

"It is a long and winding road to go through," McCaffery said. "But you go through it whether it is D.C. or Lincoln Park. With urban development, it's part of the price you pay."

Still, senior housing companies may find themselves increasingly engaged in these types of urban redevelopment projects given the relative scarcity of product in some major cities, including New York City. Take Welltower Inc. (NYSE: HCN), for example. The real estate investment trust (REIT) recently announced it is partnering with Hines to develop The Welltower, a 15-story, state-of-the-art, largely dementia/Alzheimer's care facility in Manhattan.

"The supply of residential care options for the growing elderly population of Manhattan is, at best, pathetic," Welltower [CEO Thomas DeRosa said](#) during the company's first-quarter 2016 earnings call in May. For Manhattan's population of over 1 million people, there are only 70 memory care beds, and they're of marginal quality, he noted.



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Will knows this all too well. Even she could not find appropriate, local senior housing for her aunt—a lifelong Manhattan resident—and ended up having to move her to a community in New Jersey years ago, she told SHN. In addition to the business opportunities presented by prime urban real estate, it may be personal experiences like these that steel senior housing leaders to endure the sometimes trying process of developing high-quality buildings in the heart of America's cities.

Written by [Mary Kate Nelson](#)

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