

LA DOWNTOWN NEWS

Editorial

Almost everywhere you look these days, a Downtown developer is trumpeting a project that includes not only hundreds of top-notch new units, but exciting ground-floor retail space. Before this trend goes any further, it's time to face another Downtown Los Angeles reality: The units are usually vital, but the first floor retail isn't always necessary. Welcome to the new urban marketplace.

The desire for ground-floor retail is understandable: In-house stores and restaurants are the type of amenities that can be touted to potential residents tenants. The problem is, ground-floor retail often doesn't work and usually isn't necessary or even good for the building itself or the surrounding community. Neighborhoods with low foot traffic routinely have trouble supporting the stores at the base of buildings. If a store or restaurant fails due to lack of customers, it will be that much harder to lure a business the next time.

Developers need to check out their neighborhood and recognize that much of what they want to provide may already exist within walking distance. In some cases, new ground-floor retail might serve hundreds of residents in the building, but it would compete with and potentially harm nearby businesses. It's a possible move to creating animosity with an existing community.

One project getting it right is the Alexan Savoy. When the 303-unit, \$65 million development opens later this summer, it will contain no ground-floor retail. Sure, developer Trammell Crow Residential would have had a ready market with hundreds of tenants who only want to go downstairs, but instead the company chose to respect the community, where dozens of shops and restaurants exist along First and Second streets. We like that the developer talked to area leaders and got their input before finalizing plans. Alexan Savoy residents will walk a block or so into little Tokyo or the Arts District and patronize local businesses, a less insular experience and one that is good for the community, too, creating street life and making it safer.

To be sure, this practice will not hold true for every project. But it's something that should be carefully considered. Just because every development can have a restaurant or a store doesn't mean it should.

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