

Kriseman: Downtown high-rise is one part of the housing solution for a growing St. Pete



St. Petersburg City Council Chair Ed Montanari (far left) and Mayor Rick Kriseman (second from left) turn the first ceremonial shovels of dirt for 334, on 2nd Avenue South. Also pictured are David Fellows, American Land Ventures vice president of construction; Craig Klingensmith, Coastal Construction Central Florida president; Steve Guthrie, Stantec Construction administration team lead; and Chris Steinocher, president and CEO, St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce.

People want to live in St. Petersburg.

That's why Mayor Rick Kriseman and other community leaders celebrated the groundbreaking Tuesday of 334, a 24-story residential tower with 220 upscale apartments being built at 334 2nd Ave. S.



Construction is underway for 334, a 220-unit apartment building at 334 2nd Ave. S., between 3rd Street South and 4th Street South in downtown St. Petersburg.

It's one of several projects underway downtown and throughout the city, where moderate estimates project a gain of 24,000 people by the year 2050 and a need for 1,000 more housing units each year between now and then.

“St. Petersburg cannot continue to grow, to attract company expansions and relocations, unless we have sufficient housing for the folks working for the companies we are recruiting. Until such time as the supply of housing exceeds the demand for housing, housing prices are going to continue to rise. That's why projects like this are so important,” Kriseman said. “We are a community surrounded by water with limited land available, so if we're going to continue to grow, to add housing opportunities, we're going to have to embrace density. We can't single family our way out of our housing challenges. That's why today the downtown skyline looks a lot different today than it did when I first took office in 2014. With our need for density, the downtown skyline will continue to grow and change and this project is a big part of that change.”

The upscale apartments at 334 are just one part of the overall housing solution for the city, Kriseman said while talking to news reporters after the groundbreaking. The city also is focused on creating housing that's affordable, he said. See excerpts from that conversation below.

Construction jobs

Perseverance best describes the 334 project, said David Fellows, vice president of construction at American Land Ventures, which is developing 334. The project was supposed to be built last year, but was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Coastal Construction is the general contractor. It's Coastal's first project in St. Petersburg. Global design firm Stantec is handling architecture and engineering.

The construction industry has been a driving force in helping St. Pete recover from the pandemic, said Chris Steinocher, president and CEO, St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce. At the height of the outbreak, Pinellas County lost more than 100,000 jobs. Now, it's down just 7,000 jobs and unemployment in Pinellas County is at 4 percent.

"The construction industry helped us get through it," Steinocher said.



Chris Steinocher, president and CEO, St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce, at the groundbreaking for 334.

334 is just two blocks from the planned Red Apple mixed-use development at 400 Central, and across 2nd Avenue South from the planned Blake Building at 114 4th St. S., a 20-story, 51-unit condominium building that will be developed by Blake Investment Partners.

“Within a couple of years what used to be an area of St. Pete that did not have a lot of life now is about to bring a lot more families to us,” Steinocher said.

City Council Chairman Ed Montanari called St. Petersburg “a city on the move” that has been open for business since its founding.

“St. Petersburg has transformed from a small fishing village to a quiet retirement community and now to a young, vibrant, artsy and welcoming high-tech city that we are today,” Montanari said.

Completion of 334 is expected in late 2022.

Closer look: Kriseman talks development

Mayor Rick Kriseman shared his thoughts on development in St. Petersburg during an impromptu news conference after the 334 groundbreaking. Here are some excerpts, lightly edited for clarity and brevity.

What does 334 say about the city?

“It’s a really good sign for the city. In the middle of a pandemic, a lot of things are up in the air and to continue to have faith in St. Petersburg is an important message that we certainly are trying to communicate.”

What about this wave of cranes across the city and surge of new construction?



Mayor Rick Kriseman at the groundbreaking for 334. (Photo credit: Preston Rudie, Catalyst Communications Group)

“Developers’ and lenders’ confidence level is going up. I think that’s why you’re seeing it. As our state of the economy projections showed, there’s a real need in this community for more housing. If you are someone looking for a place to live it’s not easy to find one right now.”

What does it say about St. Pete that there are so many projects right now?

“I think it speaks to who we are and what we’ve become as a city. This is a very desirable place to live, work and play, and for a very long time we’ve been a secret that the country and the world didn’t really know about. I think they’re discovering us now and the more people discover us, the more they want to be here.”

How can you keep growth under control, so it doesn’t overwhelm infrastructure?

“I think it’s all about smart growth. You have to be smart about how you grow. You have to make sure your infrastructure is keeping up with growth. In the last six years we have invested more than \$300 million, and we have a plan for the next 30 years, so it will be a \$3 billion investment to make sure we keep up with the growth that we’re having.”

Is the addition of more housing units a solution to rising prices?

“It has to be both. With the city’s For All From All plan, the city is focused on creating more housing that’s affordable throughout the community and using parcels of land that we have control over to try to create that.

“It’s a numbers game. Right now, it’s hard to find anything anywhere and that’s why your prices are going up. The more units go on the market, that helps stabilize pricing and in some cases it will bring pricing down. So we welcome projects like this. At the same time, we welcome projects like we’re going to do at the old [St. Petersburg Police headquarters] that are going to have a workforce housing component, or the new [Municipal Services Center] building and adjacent to that where there’s going to be housing built that will have a workforce component.”

So while 334 is higher-end living, it will drive prices down elsewhere?

“Absolutely. Quite frankly, we are attracting businesses from New York, we are attracting businesses from San Francisco and Seattle, and the executive and the front-end workers at those businesses and those are the kinds of places they want to live. They can walk across the street and go grocery shopping. It’s right in the heart of our downtown. What’s key is creating that mix of housing and opportunities and choices and this is a part of that.”

What about the national trend that’s emerged during the pandemic, where people are leaving downtown for the suburbs? What gives you confidence that won’t happen here?

“It’s a couple of things. In the heart of our downtown, we have one of the largest waterfront park systems in North America. The beauty of having all that parkland, especially during a pandemic, where you want people to be outside and be able to socially distance —you can do that along our whole waterfront. You can do that in our 26-acre Pier.

“Our weather has a big impact. Part of the challenges they’ve had in the Northeast and why so many people are looking to relocate from there is they can’t sit outside and have dinner. They have to be inside because it’s too bloody cold. You can do that everywhere throughout downtown. We have outside cafes everywhere in our downtown area.

“It’s a very walkable community, which is another piece that’s really important. People can walk wherever they want to go. They don’t have to get in a car, in a confined space, to get where they want to go. They can just walk there.”