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Buildings Get Bike Friendly



Bike storage racks are installed at 535W43, a luxury rental building nearing completion on West 43rd Street

One recent morning Erik Harrison, a vice president of the Patrinely Group, stopped by 535W43, a rental complex nearing completion that his company is developing with the USAA Real Estate Company between 10th and 11th Avenues in Manhattan. But it wasn't the 280 units in the two 14-story brick towers designed by CetraRuddy that were on his mind.

It was the bike rooms, one in each of the towers, located not in a shadowy basement but right on the ground level, with big windows letting in abundant light.

"We're going to have a table where people can fix their bikes, and maybe we'll hold workshops," Mr. Harrison said, surveying the south tower's 850-square-foot bike space as cyclists seen through the windows zipped by toward the Hudson River Greenway. "We'll fit as many bike racks as we can."

Driven by demand as well as a city mandate, developers and building owners are carving out bike rooms for residents to store what for some has become their transportation mode of choice.

The state-of-the-art spaces often have their own entrances, saving wear-and-tear on the lobby and passenger elevators. They also offer their own gear by way of pumps and repair stands, and, sometimes, homey touches like hooks for hanging helmets. In the fancier buildings, porters and door attendants act as bike valets.

“People come to an open house and ask, ‘Do you have a gym, a roof deck, a doorman?’” said David Maundrell III, the executive vice president for Brooklyn and Queens new development of Citi Habitats. “Now they also ask, ‘Do you have a bike room?’”

Ridership has been growing steadily, according to the New York City Department of Transportation. A 2014 survey by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene indicated that in vast swaths of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens, up to 20 percent of the population cycled several times a month. While the Citi Bike program can lay claim to some of the increase in cycling, people who own their own wheels still make up the majority of riders, according to Paul Steely White, the executive director of Transportation Alternatives, an advocacy group.

Of course, riders can store their bikes in their apartments, if there’s room. But “now when you’re spending a million dollars for a one-bedroom,” said Roberta Axelrod, the director of residential sales and marketing at Time Equities, “no one wants a bike in there” propped against the wall.

Residents of older buildings have been clamoring for the conversion of formerly empty or underutilized “back-of-house” space into storage for bikes.



At the new luxury condo Nine52 on West 52nd Street, the first 25 buyers will receive a complimentary single-speed Joulvert bicycle

“If you have a building with two- and three-bedroom apartments, 100 units doesn’t mean 100 bikes,” said Matthew Baron, the president of Simon Baron Development. “It could be 300 or 400.” Consequently, there are waiting lists for many of the city’s bike rooms.

As for new buildings, a zoning amendment passed in 2009 requires the provision of one bike space for every two units in structures of 10 apartments or more. The law also applies to substantially enlarged buildings and to those being converted to residential use.

“It used to be you’d build a building and then say, where should we put the bikes?” Ms. Axelrod said. “Now it’s included in the program from the beginning.”

In Downtown Brooklyn, 388 Bridge, a new 378-unit rental/condo building, created 190 bike spaces in three separate rooms in the basement, one space above its mandated quota.

Many buildings near parks or bike lanes, or ones geared to a demographic group that favors cycling, exceed the minimum number of spots. Forty2East, a new 53-unit condo building in East Williamsburg, has 36 bike spots, nine more than its quota.

In some cases, bike rooms are muscling out other types of storage. The Richard Meier-designed condominium One Grand Army Plaza, in Brooklyn's Prospect Heights neighborhood, originally was going to have 75 bike slots, but even before the building opened in 2008, that number was deemed inadequate — especially considering the location, opposite Prospect Park, and the number of family-size apartments it contained. After space from the garage was folded into the bike room, it accommodated 90 bikes, and, more recently, with the addition of double-decker racks and wall hooks, it now has 117 spots.

These days, however, it seems the mere provision of space isn't enough.

Bike rooms in buildings coming to market now are being tricked out with compression air pumps, of the sort found in bike shops and gas stations, and work stands to which one can clamp a bike while oiling a chain or fixing a flat. Tools are often on hand, and sometimes there's a hose for washing bikes down after a muddy ride.

At 252 East 57th Street, a condominium under construction near Second Avenue, one of the door attendants stationed at the porte-cochere will be able to whisk away a bike after a ride and have it readied for the next outing.

At the Residences at Prince, a condominium project in an 1826 landmark-designated building in NoLIta that previously housed a Catholic school, the bike room will have hooks where residents can hang their helmets between rides.

Many buildings are providing the bicycles themselves, acquiring their own fleets — emblazoned with the buildings' names — for residents' use.

Circa Central Park, a condominium taking shape at West 110th Street and Central Park West, will have four branded single-speed recreational bikes by Priority Bicycles, according to Shlomi Reuveni, a managing director of Town New Development, which is handling sales and marketing.

At 50 West, a condominium under development in Lower Manhattan, residents will be able to take the building's four Porsche bikes, which cost \$3,700 each, out for a spin.

At least one building is even giving bicycles away. Nine52, a luxury condo soon to open on West 52nd Street in Hell's Kitchen, will have 20 black single-speed Joulvert bikes, according to Maria Theresa Ienna of Park River Properties, the director of sales. It is also offering a bike, valued at around \$450, as a closing gift to the first 25 buyers.

"Customers come in and listen to the sales presentation and say, 'That's a beautiful bike,'" Ms. Ienna said. "We say, 'If you buy an apartment, the bike is yours.'" The least expensive unit in the building (already in contract) is a studio for \$597,000.

There is usually a price for parking in a bike room, according to owners and developers. The charges, which can come in the form of a monthly or annual fee, vary widely, from a token \$10 per year to \$10 to \$100 per month.

"It's a decent revenue stream," said Marc Kotler, a senior vice president for the new development group of FirstService Residential. "It can be \$10,000 or \$20,000 a year in income" for a building.

For some New Yorkers, even a bike room won't do. The finicky can stow their top-of-the-line bikes in the private storage lockers that some buildings have, safe from jostling and scratching.

Or come up with other solutions. Susi Wunsch, the founder of Velojoy, a cycling lifestyle website, keeps her everyday bike, an all-black aluminum Kona Dew with disc brakes, in the bike room of her Greenwich Village building, though she isn't a fan of wrestling it on and off overhead hooks.

She balances her Serotta Ottrott road bike — which she called her “pride and joy” — atop a bookcase in her home office. With a frame that's clear carbon and titanium, it weighs only 16 pounds.

Meanwhile, her midnight blue Pashley Britannia, with its big wicker basket strapped to the handlebars, is parked in the dining room, where “its beauty merits ‘sculpture’ status,” she said.

It helps, she added, that she has “a very understanding husband.”