

Landmark on Grand River Offers Students a Better Broadband-City Connection

Landmark on Grand River offers MSU students a 10 Gbps high-speed broadband network and a connection with the rest of the East Lansing, Michigan, community.

BROADBAND COMMUNITIES thanks Richard Laing, CEO of Spartan Net, and Brian Bell, COO of Harbor Bay Real Estate, for helping gather information for this profile.

By Sean Buckley / *Broadband Communities*

Landmark on Grand River, an apartment complex for students and young professionals, stands at the intersection of Michigan State University (MSU) and the city of East Lansing and connects the university with the community. Until the development was built, residents viewed Grand River Avenue, the main thoroughfare that separates downtown East Lansing from the MSU campus, as the “great divide” that prevented MSU and the city from coming together.

Overseen by Harbor Bay Real Estate Advisors, Landmark on Grand River is part of East Lansing’s \$125 million multigenerational, mixed-use development called Center City District Development, which also includes Newman Lofts (a 55-plus community), a Target store, and public and resident parking. Center City also includes 24,000 square feet of retail along Albert Avenue, featuring Foster Coffee, Barrio Tacos and Jolly Pumpkin, a brewery and cafe.

At Landmark on Grand River, MSU students and young professionals can access amenities that bring together the university and the surrounding community: classes, a

student union, a main bus line, sporting events, retail and dining. An added benefit is that the apartment complex sits atop a Target store. Each residential unit includes a full-sized bed, dresser, desk, desk chair and an entertainment center.

Brian Bell, chief operating officer for Harbor Bay Real Estate Advisors, says the project could become the catalyst for additional out-of-state investment in East Lansing.

“From permitting to planning and development, the project presented a unique opportunity to work with the city and the municipality and to develop the private side to it,” he says.

SPARTAN NET PROVIDES HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND

Bell adds that a key feature of Landmark on Grand River is the fiber-based broadband network provided by Spartan Net, a local ISP serving multifamily and commercial buildings.

“When we survey residents’ biggest needs, the No. 1 amenity residents want is internet,” Bell says. “We felt that Spartan’s speeds and customer service made it the best partner for this project.”



Landmark on Grand River provides unobstructed views of East Lansing's historic downtown.

Richard Laing, president of Spartan Net, agrees and adds that Landmark on Grand River is a good match for its fiber footprint and MDU fiber service focus.

“The most interesting thing for us is this project was in one of the area's best communities,” he says. “As a full turnkey service provider, we like to get in at the construction level, understand the infrastructure, and make recommendations based on what the interests and budgets of the project are.”

Complementing a full, on-site professional leasing staff, the building's maintenance team is available to address any issues residents experience in their units.

Views are also a factor. By building along Grand River Avenue and on top of a small Target, Landmark provided views of Spartan Stadium, Beaumont Tower, and other historic MSU buildings dating back to 1855. “This unique location ensures views will never be obstructed by other private

developments,” Bell says.

Grand River also offers residents a private venue for entertainment and recreation. The building includes an amenity deck, equipped with private fireplace nooks, grilling stations, and seating within its curves. The amenity deck abuts and opens into Landmark's 24-hour fitness center, yoga studio, club room, study library, print center and coffee bar, which spread over almost 20,000 square feet of common-area space.

10 GIGS TO THE UNIT

Supporting the internet service for residents is a fiber network based on XGS-PON technology that delivers up to 10 Gbps speeds to each unit.

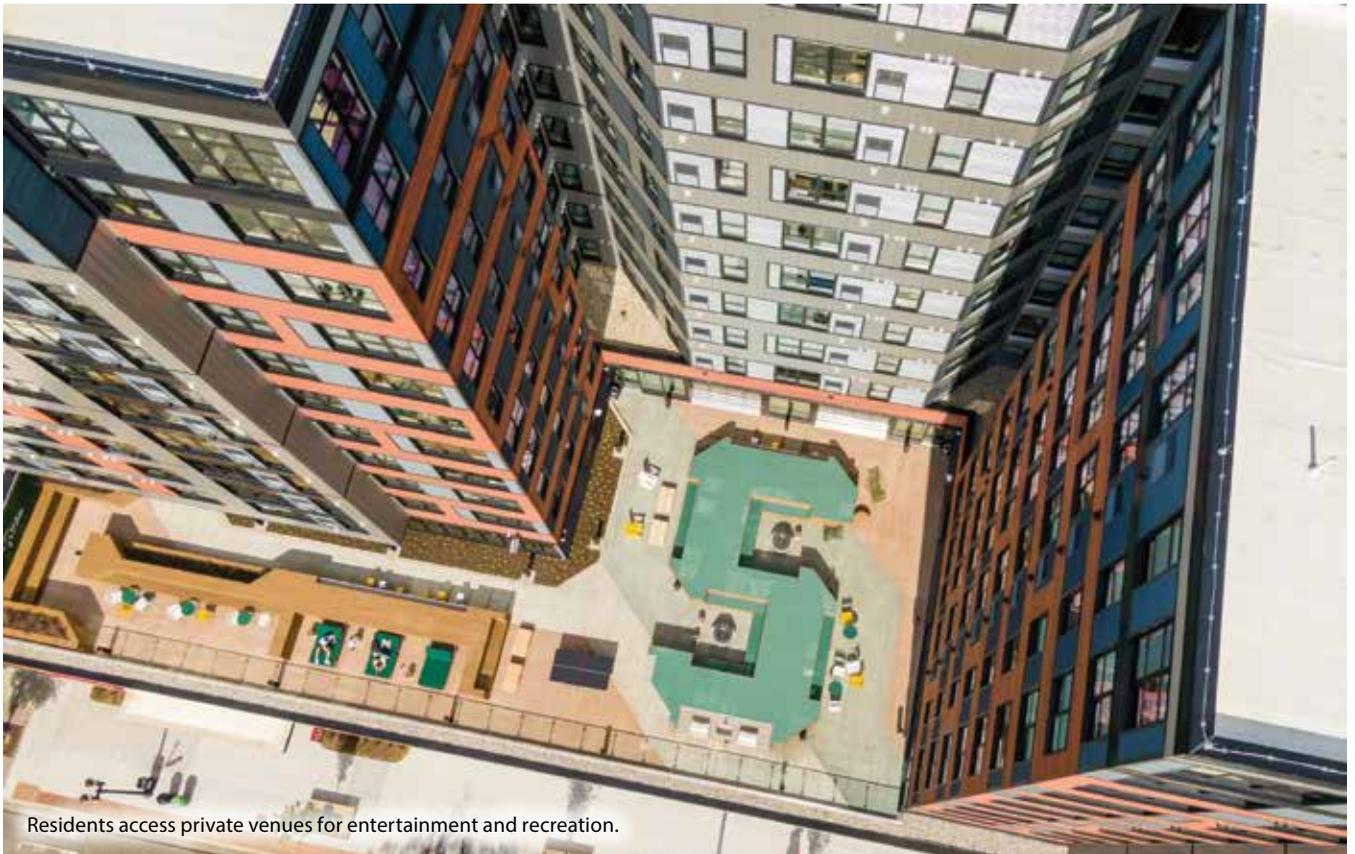
LightSpeed Technologies, Nokia's main North American value-added reseller, assisted Spartan Net in deploying one of the first XGS-PON-based student housing networks.

Besides the 10 Gbps connectivity, LightSpeed provides Nokia's residential gateways for Wi-Fi connectivity to create

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS

~ Landmark on Grand River ~

- Part of a \$125 million multigenerational, mixed-use development that connects the town and university
- All-fiber network uses XGS-PON and active Ethernet to enable 10 Gbps service
- Vendors include Nokia, Ruckus, Cisco, Juniper and LightSpeed Technologies



Residents access private venues for entertainment and recreation.

a private wireless network for every unit. In addition, Spartan Net supports a communitywide Wi-Fi network. The provider also overlaid a DirecTV L band system into the development.

“We were able to build our own fiber network into the development and put that directly into our core with 20 Gbps worth of service through our redundant data centers,” Laing says. “The end result is amazingly fast internet, which we bundled with other services, such as assistance with network installation, key systems, door entry systems and TV.”

Bell says overall, renters are satisfied with the internet speeds and services.

“The lightning-fast speeds that we have are meeting the demands of our renters,” he says. “This is one of our first developments in which we did not get requests for other internet packages because the level of speed is already there.”

As the COVID-19 pandemic shows no visible signs of slowing, Spartan Net’s

efforts are highlighting how important high-speed broadband is for students.

“With the recent news of the spike in COVID cases, there is increasing uncertainty about whether MSU will bring students back into classrooms,” Laing says. “It may be noteworthy that the 10 Gbps service to the unit at Landmark is excelling in bridging the great digital divide” by giving students high-speed broadband service to access online classes and materials.

A SOUND LIAISON

Although XGS-PON provides a high-speed network, the challenge is supporting and maintaining it. After settling on XGS-PON, Spartan Net took another six months to build out the product.

“XGS-PON is a bleeding-edge product, and there is no integration process that enables a plug-and-play network within this type of community, so we had to create that on our own,” Laing says. “Spartan Net did

a lot of product development to make the process seamless.”

Bell says Spartan Net also served as a go-between Harbor Bay and the general contractor.

“Spartan Net was a great liaison in some of the demands we were asking for because it offered a pathway to make the network happen,” Bell says. “Having an IT specialist that can be the champion with the developer and understand how we want the network to function – and then disseminate that information to the general contractor – was essential.”

VITAL STATISTICS

Property Description: Located near the historic intersection of M.A.C. Avenue and Albert Avenue in the heart of downtown East Lansing and adjacent to MSU, the Center City District Development has transformed East Lansing’s skyline and redefined what living in downtown East Lansing and off campus means. Harbor Real Estate

Advisors, a real estate development and management firm headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois, completed Center City in just under two years. It is a \$125-million, multigenerational, mixed-use development that includes Landmark on Grand River, Newman Lofts (55-plus housing), a Target store, public and resident parking and 24,000 square feet of retail along Albert Avenue.

The centerpiece and anchor of Center City is Landmark on Grand River. Located atop Michigan's first small-format Target and within 60 yards of the MSU student union, Landmark has quickly become the top location for off-campus living, but provides an on-campus vibe students desire. Opened in August 2019, the 12-story Landmark provides 273 residential units (464 beds) designed for undergraduate and graduate students, young faculty and professionals seeking a downtown experience with a first-floor grocer and an unmatched location. In its first year of operation, Landmark achieved a 98 percent occupancy rate and by the end of January 2020 had achieved a 98 percent pre-leased rate for the 2020–2021 school year. The pre-leasing success was achieved while increasing lease rates by 5 percent. It doesn't expect a dip in occupancy as a result of COVID-19.

Demographics: A mixed-use development combining residential and retail. Landmark on Grand River provides student housing for MSU students and faculty and young professionals, and Newman Lofts is a 55-plus housing community.

Greenfield or retrofit? Greenfield

Number of units: Landmark on Grand River has 273 apartments with 464 beds, and Newman Lofts has 91 apartments. The development includes 23,000 square feet of retail space.

Style: High-rise

Time to deploy? Two years: Oct 2017–October 2019

Date services started being delivered: August 2019

SERVICES

Services offered or planned on the network: Spartan Net provides 10 Gbps fiber-based broadband to every unit. The service provider also offers video via a relationship with DirecTV, automated resident Wi-Fi and telephone service. Additional services include access control, building/home monitoring and control, and building management. From a building-security perspective, the development offers closed-circuit TV and IP-POE video surveillance. Outside of the units, Spartan Net offers centrally managed common-area Wi-Fi via CommScope/Ruckus wireless gear and a 12-channel ClearQAM video headend for common-area TV.

PROVIDER CHOICE

Do additional service providers operate separate broadband networks on the same property? No. Because



Students can access 10 Gbps and TV in their living units.

Landmark has an exclusive contract with Spartan Net, the provider can offer great value, tender care for the asset, and peace of mind for the owner and manager.

Technical support: Spartan Net offers 7/24/365 support on all technology offerings for both residents and the property management company.

BUSINESS

Which parts of the network does the service provider own, and which parts belong to the property owner?

Spartan Net owns all the technology and network infrastructure, and Harbor Bay owns the riser.

Is there a marketing agreement with the property owner? If yes, is it exclusive or nonexclusive? Yes; exclusive

Does the agreement include an incentive such as a door fee or revenue share? Yes

How do the service provider and owner work together to market the services? What marketing approaches have been particularly successful? Cross-selling properties from Spartan Net's proprietary customer portal, "MyAccount"; access to Spartan Net's Fiberhood map at www.spartan-net.com/find-your-fiberhood.html.

Is there a bulk-service agreement?
Yes

Network benefits: Is there evidence that the network helps attract residents, retain residents, increase property values, etc.?
Yes, the property must have high-speed internet. Today, Spartan Net serves more than 10,000 people (6,500 are students, representing

more than 21 percent of potential off-campus students).

TECHNOLOGY

Broadband architecture: The broadband architecture is based on fiber to the unit to deliver 10 Gbps service. Spartan Net uses a mixture of Nokia's XGS-PON and active Ethernet.

Methods for running cables between buildings: Spartan Net incorporated various methods to run cables between and inside buildings. The service provider buried fiber in conduits and stubbing between riser conduits. For home runs, it used microduct with fiber and RG6/11 coax for TV video.

Vendors/products

- Ruckus (Wi-Fi access points)
- Nokia (XGS-PON equipment)
- Cisco (routers)

- Juniper (routers)
- Spartan Net (consulting and design services)

LESSONS LEARNED

What was the biggest challenge?

Delivering a seamless integration of the advanced technology with all the trades while meeting a very tight deadline of two years for constructing 10-story and 12-story buildings simultaneously. Harbor Bay had to effectively work with union and multiple trades that were required to provide committed labor to meet the aggressive timelines. It also had to deliver instant-on service to multigenerational residents and traditional retail while creating a gateway between East Lansing's downtown city center and MSU. Because the property was originally restricted to a height of four stories, Harbor Bay had to acquire a special-use variance on height restrictions for the 10-story and 12-story developments.

What was the biggest success?

A remarkable and seamless opening with a great product that exceeded expectations.

What feedback does the leasing/sales office get from residents?

Not one person has complained about the technology. The closest thing to a complaint has been that Amazon did not deliver packages quickly enough. The properties are securing 100 percent lease-up for next year. Residents are choosing the properties not just for the views but for the performance of the ultrahigh-speed internet and technical amenities.

What should other owners consider before they get started on a similar deployment?

Start early in the visionary stage if possible. Consider technology as a requirement and equal to electricity and plumbing. ❖

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