

Micro-Apartment Living at Gigabit Speed: The Vic at Interpose

The Houston property plays to renters' desire for high-speed, instant-on, affordable broadband. **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** thanks Kate Good, partner and senior vice president of multifamily development at Hunington Residential; Stephanie Burriss, director of multifamily operations at Hunington Residential; and DISH Fiber for helping develop this profile.

By Sean Buckley / *Broadband Communities*

Houstonians looking to rent modern apartments with balconies, large windows and 1 Gbps broadband connectivity need look no farther than The Vic at Interpose. The property, located in the heart of Houston's Washington Heights Social District, offers studio apartment homes with what developer Hunington Residential calls "prominent personalities."

As the neighborhood's first multifamily micro-apartment building, The Vic has 168 units, more than 21,500 square feet of street-level retail, expansive walkable corridors and outdoor patio seating. It features a rooftop kitchen and pool with 360-degree views, a dog park and a climbing wall. It has easy accessibility to all major freeways, most desirable neighborhoods, and various restaurants and nightlife.

The Vic is a new kind of development for Hunington Residential. Traditionally, the developer focused on building retail and garden-style apartment communities with surface parking, three stories, and walk-up apartments. It also built mixed-use "wrap" developments in which residences are wrapped around garage parking decks or retail establishments.

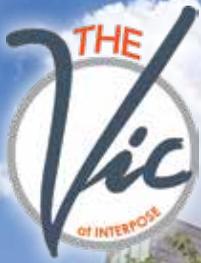
Kate Good, a partner and senior vice president of multifamily development with

Hunington Residential, says that at first glance, the site, which previously housed an abandoned church, wasn't the most obvious place to build a housing development. "The site was almost 2 acres and is not something you would normally look at and say, 'let's put an apartment community there,' unless you were going tall," she says. "We loved the location, and it's in the heart of the fun zone for Friday and Saturday nights in Houston."

MICRO-APARTMENT FOCUS

One of the latest opportunities Hunington is pursuing in the multifamily space is micro-apartments. A micro-apartment is a single-occupant studio designed to be as compact as possible. The apartments have all the amenities of a standard studio apartment – kitchen, bathroom, available living space – but they're squeezed into a small footprint of about 400 square feet.

Though micro-apartments are prevalent in markets including Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; and Seattle, they are a relatively new concept in Houston. Good says Hunington's goal is to include in its micro-apartments every functional amenity a resident would need, such as closet space, a bathroom, in-unit laundry, a



At The Vic, DISH Fiber offers instantly accessible, personal Wi-Fi networks propertywide with no data caps.

kitchen, and large windows.

The Vic's 168 units range from 386 to about 850 square feet. Good says that the smallest apartments have been a big hit with renters. "The first apartment we leased, and the first-floor plan that sold out, was the 386-square-foot apartments," she says. "One of the reasons it has been successful is we could hit a particular price point for a brand-new apartment."

Though the micro-apartment concept may be just emerging in the Houston market, Hunington finds that it resonates with a diverse set of renters. The Vic's micro-apartments attract first-time renters aged 18–25 years old. A woman in her 70s leased a micro-apartment while she awaits the completion of a new home.

BANKING ON VALUE, CONVENIENCE

Affordable, high-speed broadband is key to The Vic's appeal, mainly because 40 to 45 percent of The Vic's residents work from home. "High-speed connectivity is needed," says Stephanie Burriss, director of multifamily

operations for Hunington. "Residents demand it."

Enter DISH Fiber and its managed Wi-Fi service. DISH Fiber offers instantly accessible, personal Wi-Fi networks propertywide with no data caps. Managed Wi-Fi resonates with multifamily property managers and developers because it provides a secure, propertywide internet network for residents and property staff and connectivity in common areas.

"We knew it was important for people who live here to keep the monthly bill low, and that's where DISH Fiber comes in," Good says. For The Vic, DISH Fiber struck a bulk internet

service deal with Hunington. The property owner could roll the internet service price into its amenity fee.

The bulk internet deal helps residents spend less on internet than if they purchased service directly from a provider. "If residents went to DISH directly or an incumbent cable or telco, they would pay \$125 for high-speed internet and streaming TV," Good says. "We could do a bulk buy for much less than that."

Hunington's top priority was enhancing the rental experience. "We wanted to build as much value as possible into the renting opportunity," Good says. "If we could say, 'you get a

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS

~ The Vic at Interpose ~

- 168-unit micro-apartment community
- DISH video-streaming services
- 1 Gbps instant-on symmetrical broadband
- Common-area wireless



The smallest and most popular micro-apartments at The Vic are just 386 square feet.

martini terrace, fitness center, rooftop pet park and have high-speed internet and streaming TV available upon moving in,' we rolled in price, value and convenience."

FOCUS ON BULK INTERNET

Bulk agreements, such as the one The Vic established with DISH, provide an entire multifamily community with phone, internet, cable and other broadband services. This means that a bulk cable and internet contract has every unit in a condo or community under one provider.

Before Hunington met with a consultant to gather proposals for internet service, the developer explored the idea of a bulk buy. "When we spoke to other developers and property management companies, I said I did not want to be the cable or the internet company," Good says. "When Hunington first started doing bulk buys in the 1990s, it tried to be the provider, and it was a nightmare for the on-site staff."

Aware that its reputation would tie to the provider's reputation, Hunington had to make sure the provider offered a positive customer experience. Based on research by and feedback from a third-party consultant, the developer found that DISH Fiber was the best fit. It is still a relatively new provider, so the

biggest challenge was agreeing to be an early adopter. "We repeatedly looked at the DISH Fiber proposal," Good says. "We liked the price point and the speed and capacity."

Reputation and brand awareness are vital. DISH was once synonymous with satellite television, but the service provider has been pushing to establish itself as competitive broadband and streaming TV player.

In 2019, DISH unveiled DISH Fiber, a bulk solution for multifamily communities that provides residents with managed Wi-Fi and live streaming TV upon move in.

The service is available to property owners with no upfront cost and designed to work with any community's existing or upgraded network infrastructure.

"If we're selling this service as a high-value item with great speed and capacity, the name has to stand out, and I felt that DISH was investing in rebranding and selling its message," Good says. "We must do the same because residents need to have confidence that we can meet their expectations."

INSTANT-ON BANDWIDTH

As part of the DISH Fiber service, all residents will be able to access internet service as soon as they move into The Vic.

The Vic's \$135 monthly amenity fee includes water, sewer, trash, gas and one reserved parking space – plus 1 Gbps of DISH Fiber internet and DISH's most popular streaming channels.

"During the leasing phase, the big wow factor for residents is that the broadband service is already set up," Burriss says. "All residents have to do is connect to the network, set up their passwords, and connect their devices, so it's very user-friendly."

Having internet immediately available alleviates stress for residents because they don't need to wait for technicians to show up. Residents also appreciate that internet service is available throughout the property – they remain connected whether they're at the fitness center or by the pool. "They like not switching from network to network as they're walking with their devices, which can be problematic if they're working and are on a Zoom call," Burriss says.

VITAL STATISTICS

Property Description: The Vic at Interpose is a trendy, 168-unit multifamily, mixed-use community in Houston, Texas. In the heart of the buzzing Washington Heights Social District, it features micro-apartments with a host of amenities.

Demographics: Young renters (mostly in their 20s and 30s)

Greenfield or retrofit? Retrofit

Number of units: 168

Style (High-rise/mid-rise/garden): Mid-rise

Time to deploy? Deployed currently

Date services started being delivered: August 10, 2021

Did the property have any special requirements? No

LESSONS LEARNED

What was the biggest challenge? Agreeing to be an early adopter of DISH Fiber. The developer, Hunington Residential, had to learn several technical details quickly

because managed bulk internet is a new concept for multifamily communities. Although Hunington has a seasoned leasing team, there was a bit of a learning curve for learning to successfully market DISH Fiber service to prospective residents.

What was the most significant success? Hunington says the most considerable success of the DISH Fiber service is the value it adds to the community and for residents. The property's monthly \$135 amenity fee includes 1 Gbps internet service and DISH's top streaming channels. Hunington says it has differentiated itself in the apartment rental market by offering symmetrical gigabit service to residents.

What feedback does the leasing office get from residents/guests? The instant-on broadband capability has been a huge draw and convenience to The Vic's residents, who appreciate and expect the instant-on service.

What should other owners consider before they get started on a similar deployment? Before making bulk agreements with providers, owners should consider how to market to prospective residents who may not immediately appreciate that their internet and TV provider choices are nonelective. For Hunington, the instant-on internet played a positive role in the leasing process. Other owners should also consider how they will handle technical support questions and troubleshoot. Hunington did not want to become a service hub for the provider but found its concerns were unfounded because of efficient provider processes, quality equipment and responsive customer service.

SERVICES

Services offered or planned on the network: Through its partner DISH Fiber, The Vic offers 1 Gbps high-speed internet access, video streaming and common-area wireless.

Do additional service providers operate separate broadband networks on the same property?

No. DISH Fiber is the sole provider.

Is the point of contact for resident technical support the property manager, the service provider, or a third party? Hunington directs residents to the DISH customer support line for all technical support questions. Most are resolved remotely and within a few minutes. If an issue cannot be resolved remotely, a skilled support technician is promptly dispatched to the property and communicates real-time updates to the resident and The Vic's on-site leasing team.

BUSINESS

Which parts of the network does the provider own, and which parts are owned by the property owner? DISH Fiber owns its entire infrastructure and the fiber, including the fiber home runs. The Vic holds all of the inside wiring.

Is there a marketing agreement with the property owner? Yes.

If yes, is it exclusive or nonexclusive? Exclusive

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

How do the service provider and owner work together to market the services? What marketing approaches have been particularly successful? The Vic is a participant in the DISH Fiber Premier Property Program. The Vic presents DISH with the opportunity to use it as one of its "premier properties" in DISH marketing efforts to encourage additional properties to enter agreements that utilize DISH services. Hunington has provided quotes and testimonials of its experiences thus far, and Hunington staff and executives supply references to prospective DISH clients. DISH recently sponsored a resident event at The Vic. Hunington's leasing team passed

out DISH materials, directing residents on how to upgrade their current TV experience.

Is there a bulk-service agreement?

If so, what services are included? Can residents upgrade from the bulk services? Yes. The Vic's bulk service agreement with DISH Fiber consists of a symmetrical gigabyte and more than 20 channels of streaming video service. Residents who want to upgrade their video packages can.

TECHNOLOGY

Broadband architecture: The Vic had DISH Fiber construct a fiber-to-the-unit network. DISH also takes fiber into the building and to each floor.

Where are ONTs placed? On the central wiring panel. DISH Fiber designed a fiber Ethernet architecture.

Technology/medium used to deliver signals to each unit: The network distributes signals via Ethernet Cat 5 or 6 cabling and Wi-Fi.

Methods for running cables between, vertically within and horizontally within buildings: The services run vertically and horizontally. DISH Fiber ran its fiber infrastructure into The Vic's MDF room from the street. DISH extended its fiber vertically from the MDF to the IDFs. The thread was then connected horizontally from each IDF to individual units.

Vendors/products

- One Source Realty Advisors (technology and negotiations)
- MKT Consulting (device connectivity, installation)
- DISH Fiber (internet service) ❖



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