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Downtown housing strong

■ Vacancy rate of 3.5% is well below the U.S. average of 5.7%.

DAVID TYLER
STAFF WRITER

The downtown housing market is downright hot, according to a new survey released Wednesday by the Rochester Downtown Development Corp.

The vacancy rate for housing downtown is 3.5 percent, the RDDC said. That's well below the national average of 5.7 percent.

"There has been a quantifiable, national mind-shift regarding downtown living, and Rochesterians have responded enthusiastically to these new housing opportunities as well," Heidi Zimmer-Meyer, president of RDDC, said in a statement.

RDDC officials could not be reached for comment Wednesday, but they have been urging developers to build more downtown housing units.

In the winter months, RDDC surveyed 74 property owners representing more than 2,000 units downtown and in High Falls and Corn Hill. There are an additional 280 rental and owner-occupied units in various stages of development downtown to fill the demand, RDDC said.

Leading the trend are loft-style units, which draw monthly rents as high as \$3,200 and offer hardwood floors, exposed brick and slick-looking appliances. There are 77 units currently under construction, the RDDC said.

The developer of one of those loft projects, Jim Costanza, who along with his family is renovating the Temple Building, said he thinks the demand for downtown units, while relatively small, will continue during the next few years.

"Ultimately the question is 'How deep is the demand?'" he said.

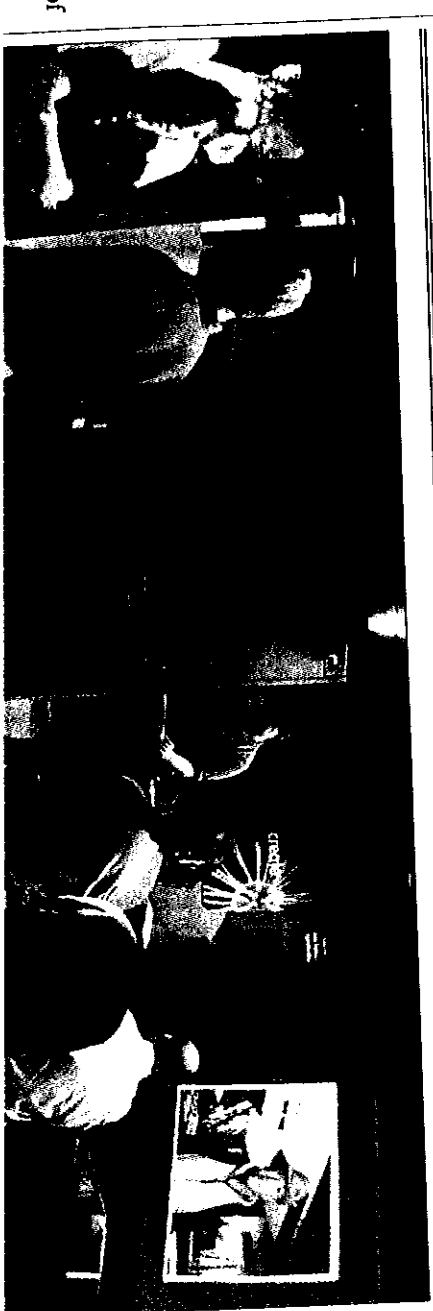
"I don't really know the answer to that. If downtown becomes a vibrant place, the demand will be created," he said. "If downtown goes the other direction, the demand will dissipate."

Paul Foti, a vice president at Mark IV Development, also said he expects the downtown resurgence to continue.

Mark IV plans to start construction on the 120-unit Cornhill Landing complex on the Genesee River within 30 days.

"Our outlook is that the downtown market is going to be a success or otherwise we wouldn't be investing the kind of money we are," he said. □

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