Traditional indoor shopping malls across the country are rapidly declining in popularity, and their rate of vacancy and abandonment is increasing. At the same time, an aging population increases the demand for safe, comfortable and affordable housing, close to transportation and amenities. These trends merge at the former Irondequoit Mall, a portion of which is being transformed and revitalized into outstanding housing for the community’s senior residents.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional indoor malls were struggling to maintain leases and occupancy. It is reasonable to predict this trend will continue. Malls offer several significant benefits that foster redevelopment, including reasonable real estate cost, existing parking and utilities infrastructure, and locations in pedestrian friendly areas with proximity to services.

VIDEO WALKTHROUGH OF SKYVIEW PARK SENIOR HOUSING AT vimeo.com/passeroassociates/skyview
Typical of many former shopping malls, the former Irondequoit Mall features a huge footprint and is centrally located in a fully developed area. It had been long abandoned and was a large eyesore in the middle of a vibrant community.

Developers often propose building new housing projects near existing neighborhoods. Resistance is common from current residents who do not want large residential buildings near their single-family homes. What better place to locate these developments than where there is already a large building with ready access to roadways and services?

Four separate parcels housed big-box retailers at the former Irondequoit Mall. Pathstone Corporation, a private, not-for-profit community development organization, acquired one location, the former Sears store, to redesign it for senior housing. Advantages to the mall location included an existing firewall separating the space from the balance of the super structure and independent utility services from the site that didn’t rely on internal connections. This situation is common as many large retailers have their own subdivided “lot” even though the buildings are connected.

The Architects at Passero Associates, working with Christa Construction, created courtyards in the space by removing three large areas of the interior of the building. This allowed for new interior units to have open space in the center of the building. These courtyards will become central to daily life in the development. Gardens, picnic areas, and places for passive and active recreation are housed in these spaces.

The huge square footprint with vast interior space presented a challenge: How does housing with a need for light and ventilation work in a former retail building? The answer is: Courtyards.

Converting aging malls into high quality housing presents many such challenges. Master Plans for each redevelopment effort need to consider the best use of infrastructure and space. Housing is one of many potential uses which can co-exist in a mixed-use redeveloped retail facility. The successful revitalization of these large structures benefits the entire community and contributes to a sustainable future.

The Architects and Engineers at Passero Associates are ready to bring their expertise to work in meeting this challenge, helping to determine cost-effective solutions that will transform our communities.