2018 REVIEW

The Houston apartment market began to stabilize coming out of Hurricane Harvey. At 93.8% in the fourth quarter of 2018, average apartment occupancy was down 60 basis points annually. Even with the most recent decrease, occupancy was 130 basis points higher than the 10-year average. Contributing to the latest decline was more than 8,300 units coming online in 2018. Apartment demand remained positive last year, though trailed the postrecession high absorption in 2017 indicating many homeowners returned to residences following the recovery from Hurricane Harvey. Even with the slowdown in leasing activity, apartment operators kept pressure on rent as the job market rebounded. At $1,129 per month in December 2018, effective rent advanced 4.0% annually. Rent growth trailed the median household income increase of 4.4%. Contributing to the rise in income was the 6.4% growth in the professional and business services sector, where salaries were nearly 60% higher than the metro average. Overall, employment expanded 3.6% in 2018.

2019 PREVIEW

Multifamily builders will continue to scale back deliveries this year to move supply and demand closer to equilibrium. Construction is scheduled to complete on 5,560 units by year-end, down a third from deliveries in 2018. Deliveries may remain subdued in the near-term as multifamily permits were filed for 12,300 units in 2018, down more than 20% from the preceding five-year average issuance. Apartment additions will remain concentrated in the Inner Loop with nearly half of all deliveries this year, where single-family housing starts and apartment deliveries continue to lag new household formation. Driving demand will be employment growth. Total nonfarm employment is forecast to expand 2.6%, or by 81,100 jobs, this year. Leasing activity is expected to remain positive in the area and across the metro as single-family home prices are forecast to rise 1.5% while existing single-family home sales dip 0.6%. Even with sustained rental demand, supply-side pressure is forecast to cause a 60-basis-point reduction in average apartment occupancy to 93.2% by year-end. Even with the decline in occupancy, effective rent is expected to rise 4.2% year over year. At $1,177 per month in December, average effective rent is forecast to be more than $300 less than the typical mortgage payment.