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## **New urbanism**

### **Pedestrian friendly, self-contained neighborhoods on the rise**

As new communities sprout across the rapidly growing region, development interests responsible for building the houses, condos and apartments are taking a bold step that's actually a blast from the past:

They're building self-contained neighborhoods.

In a reversal of recent building patterns, suburban homes-only enclaves are gradually giving way to closer-knit communities where homes and stores are nearby neighbors. Instead of getting into the car to go shopping, residents can walk a few blocks or ride a bike to shop down the street.

Welcome to "new urbanism."

Buddy Milliken, developer of Woodsong, a traditional neighborhood development in Shallotte, said the new urbanist style is a variation of the popular planned unit developments, or PUDs, and promotes neighborhood identity by encouraging residents to stay close to home for shopping and services.

"Oh, the lexicon changes over time, from neotraditional to traditional neighborhoods to new urbanism. A PUD is a distinct form of mixed-use pedestrian-type development expressed in a traditional neighborhood design but doesn't mix those uses on a fine enough scale. It assembles various uses but does not integrate them in a pedestrian way. New urbanism does," he said.

#### **Shop at home**

With two phases of housing completed in Woodsong, Milliken said the retail and services portion of the 6-year-old development will break ground before the end of the year.

Sprawl, he said, has finally brushed up against a growing popular awareness that communities or subdivisions need not leave such large "environmental footprints," consuming natural resources and displacing wildlife. Instead, incorporating natural elements into clustered communities and making them pedestrian-friendly "so people don't have to get in their cars all the time" are guiding elements in new urbanism.

"There is a desire to have more opportunity for residential contact," he said.

Not isolating residents from retail centers is at the heart of the new Devaun Park development near Calabash, and at Demarest Village development in Ogden, said Scott Stewart, developer and land designer for both projects.

"I was determined in my career to fix sprawl wherever I can," Stewart said of the design of the two developments, one in Brunswick, one in New Hanover County.

#### **Back to the future**

"It's tough to be the guy on the outside," running against the conventional wisdom of subdivisions, Stewart said, but noted Devaun Park is similar to the Middle Sound area: Both are on peninsulas and have similar traditional neighborhood designs. Each has neighborhood parks and area preserved as open space. At Devaun Park, a planned

13-acre village square green space, with a bandstand, will have retail establishments around it. And although the neighborhood design doesn't include plans for "a big draw," or anchor store, "some marquee mom-and-pop stores" are planned, he said. There are also plans for a hotel facing the central village square.

"By doing a village square, it helps to redirect traffic through the neighborhood," he said. The trend toward new urbanism has "tipped the scales" back toward the true neighborhood style of home ownership, Stewart said, although it may have taken "10 years to filter through Realtors, utility companies and home builders" to gain favor.

#### **Trimming traffic**

Traffic-reducing developments are what's needed to give Brunswick's overburdened highways a break, said county Planning Director Leslie Bell. The county's new unified development ordinance, slated for adoption in a few months, calls for more of them.

"It does promote that type of development; more town and village clusters give residents a sense of a community where you can live, work and play," he said.

The UDO contains requirements that interior roads be interconnected so drivers don't have to travel on key county highways or thoroughfares. All proposed developments have to submit projected traffic impact analyses, regardless of size, Bell said. In a best-case scenario, traffic on local highways could be reduced from 25 to 40 percent if the number of cars is reduced by an average two trips per day coming from subdivisions. "We can't control the state roads, so it does give us some avenue to try to reduce the amount of traffic that has to get on them," he said.

#### **Coming soon:**

##### **Huge 'village'**

**What could be the county's largest subdivision, Brunswick Forest, is rising along U.S. 17 in the Leland. The 5,000-acre community is a PUD approved for 12,000 single-family and multi-family housing units, said development company spokesman Jimmy Sloan.**

**"Within that area will be 200 acres of commercial and retail space. A big portion of that is the commercial village which will have frontage on U.S. 17," he said.**

**In its interior, the large development will also have a "town center" retail area where neighborhood shoppers can buy domestic goods as well as specialty items. "The retail village and town center are an important part of the project," Sloan said.**

**He said no firm decisions have been made on the type or number of commercial facilities planned for the development; a consultant company is handling that aspect of the project.**

**Sloan said the first concrete signs of Brunswick Forest subdivision, besides the clearing and roadwork behind a wall of pine trees along U.S. 17, will soon be visible.**

**"We'll start work soon on the front entry wall. That will be the first structure that will be visible from the highway," he said. "Then, there will be more activity when we build a sales center and a wellness center that will be under way in 2007."**

**Brunswick Forest will have a network of internal, interconnected roads tied into commercial areas to blunt massive traffic outflow onto the highway, he said. "We want to maintain the internal capture (of traffic), and we want to do it responsibly."**

##### **Finding the right retail mix**

**Woodsong's Milliken said traffic engineering and "internal capture" rates are aspects of new urbanism and "smart growth" initiatives adopted by area developers to keep traffic impact to a minimum.**

**"Of course, it all depends on what kinds of (retail) services are offered," Milliken said, jokingly adding that the nature of business development requires "an attempt to predict the personal behavior of people you don't know."**

**But there are fairly generic patterns of what will happen, he said.**

**"If the quality of the area is superior, even if variety of choice is limited, people may be inclined to shop there more often" and not drive farther away, he said.**

**As to types of accessible retail stores and commercial services included inside residential neighborhoods, Milliken classed the businesses as a fairly standard bread-and-butter variety that meet daily needs and also offer opportunities for impulse purchases.**

**"It's all based on Maslow's heirarchy, isn't it," he said, describing a theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow in a 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation." The paper presented normal human needs in ascending order of importance, with food, water and shelter at the base of the pyramid.**

**"At the top, maybe you'd have an opera company. But for sure in the middle you'd have some businesses to meet the needs of daily living. Consultants are involved in making these distinctions based on a survey of the residents. Getting the right mix of stores and businesses in there, it's really key," he said.**

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