

# Mixed-use development marks growth in Buncombe County

## New style of planning mirrors national trend

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**REYNOLDS** — For decades, post-World War II development patterns resembled many 3-year-olds' dinner plates.

On the plate, the beef might be over here, the green beans over there and the corn somewhere else — never ever touching one another.

On the ground, single-family homes might go in one area, apartments or condominiums somewhere else, retail stores in a third place and offices in yet another location. Instead of being kept apart by plastic dinner plate dividers, the different kinds of land uses were separated by stretches of asphalt navigable only by car.

Nowadays, developers are mixing it up on suburban sites around Asheville. Buncombe County is seeing a growing number of mixed-use developments outside downtown Asheville that combine residential, retail and office development in one relatively compact package.

The projects are part of a national trend. Mixed-use developments either planned or underway around the county include:

■ Eastwood Village, a mostly completed collection of single-family homes, apartments and condominiums and small



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Terry and Patricia Call sit on their porch in Eastwood Village in Reynolds. The development is an example of a trend toward more compact neighborhoods with a mixture of commercial and residential uses in suburban areas of Buncombe County.

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# DEVELOPMENT: Biltmore Park expansion planned

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tend to walk more to shop than people who live in typical suburban single-family developments.

But, he said, commuting behavior is not that different, he said. Residents of the new communities tend to be professionals with fairly specialized jobs and often cannot or do not find employment in an office a couple of blocks away, he said. Many of the developments offer large number of retail positions.

"There's a mismatch between the types of jobs that are offered there and the people who live there," Rodriguez said.

Downtown Asheville has seen a number of mixed-use renovation or new construction projects, and a project in the same vein is proposed on Haywood Road in West Asheville.

Rodriguez said it is becoming more common to see neo-traditional or urban village developments in suburban areas.

Open land away from the city center gives a developer more freedom to configure the communities and involves less red tape than downtown construction, he said.

## Strong demand

With one very small exception, Eastwood Village has been a financial and community success, said Harry Pilos, whose Delphi Development developed the project.

Homes sold well and at higher prices than originally planned, there has been good demand for apartments and only a few of the condominiums to be completed in a few weeks have not been spoken for, Pilos said.

Not all of the retail space has been leased, however, which Pilos said is a product of his desire to attract tenants that contribute to the community feel.

For example, "I've been saving one space," Pilos said. "I want a coffee shop" because it would be another community gathering place.

Biltmore Farms announced in February that it and Char-

lotte-based developer Crosland Inc. plan to start work this year to add 200,000 square feet of retail space, a 15-screen movie theater, 125,000 square feet of office space, 300 multi-family housing units, and a hotel to Biltmore Park.



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This artist's rendering provided by Crosland Inc. is designed to give a feel for what a mixed-use development at Biltmore Park will look like.

History does not record Biltmore House founder George W. Vanderbilt slipping out of the house to visit a 15-screen movie theater.

But, said Biltmore Farms President Jack Cecil, "The model that we're going off of is what my great-grandfather did with Biltmore Village. ... There were retail shops with apartments above them and there were single-family homes around" the village and civic uses like a church.

Cecil said so far the announcement has received "positive reaction, from what we can gather, from all camps because of the sustainability" of the community.

The development would have taken another 26 acres if Biltmore Farms had not elected to build it in an urban style with parking decks and mixed-use buildings with offices and homes upstairs and retail below, Cecil said.

"The hardest piece to absorb is the cost of the parking decks," he said, but the project "does make sense financially."

## WNC population projection

County	July 2005	July 2015	July 2025
Avery	18,195	19,848	21,085
Buncombe	217,423	244,603	272,005
Cherokee	26,063	29,266	31,891
Clay	9,811	11,280	12,450
Graham	8,105	8,523	8,846
Haywood	57,097	62,906	68,380
Henderson	97,810	115,539	133,563
Jackson	36,245	41,373	45,778
Macon	32,257	37,555	42,768
Madison	20,361	22,204	23,951
McDowell	43,576	48,182	52,717
Mitchell	16,101	16,910	17,546
Polk	19,170	21,876	24,738
Rutherford	63,397	66,504	69,535
Swain	13,600	15,014	16,399
Transylvania	29,850	31,667	33,005
Watauga	42,955	45,066	46,640
Yancey	18,167	19,503	20,677

Source: N.C. State Demographer's Office; R. Bradley/CITIZEN-TIMES



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Retail space in Eastwood Village is available for lease. Harry Pinos, with the development company, said he wants to attract retailers who will contribute to the community's feel.

## DEVELOPMENT: Urban villages more popular

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retail village off Charlotte Highway in Reynolds.

■ Gerber Village, which includes retail and office space plus a few townhomes close to Hendersonville Road in Skyland and will eventually include townhomes and more commercial development farther back.

■ Town Square at Biltmore Park, a large addition of retail, office and multifamily residential buildings to the existing community on Long Shoals Road in Skyland.

■ An "urban village" under construction in the larger Riverbend Marketplace shopping center in east Asheville.

### Knowing your neighbor

Terry Call said he and his wife, Patricia, haven't regretted buying a home in Eastwood Village more than two years ago. Single-family homes in the development are closer together than in most suburban development in the county, but the village's configuration means the couple can walk to the bank or to get a bite to eat and are more likely to run into their neighbors.

"We like to be able to hear that there are people around. We aren't the kind of people who like to be isolated," Call said.

When looking for a place to

retire, "We wanted to be in a true community" and that's the way it has turned out, he said. "Even the folks in the bank, they are our neighbors."

Advocates of what are sometimes called "neo-traditional" developments say they mirror development patterns from the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, when people lived closer together and didn't have to spend so much time driving from one place to the next.

The hope is that the developments will reduce commuting time and traffic congestion while reducing sprawl, because the dense projects create less demand for land. Some advocates say they could create opportunities for affordable housing.

"You bring in the possibility of reducing the number of trips that people have to make," said Scott Shuford, the city's director of planning and development. "If they are able to live, work and recreate in the same proximity ... there's less need to get out on the highway."

Mixed-use developments like Eastwood appeal to people looking for "a small-town environment with everything close by," said Yan Song, an assistant professor of city and regional planning

at UNC Chapel Hill.

### How affordable?

"There is an increasing population ... (who) prefer this kind of lifestyle," she said. As a result, homes in neo-traditional developments command a 17 percent price premium over comparable properties elsewhere, Song said.

Whether the communities meet the goal of providing affordable housing "is a question," she said. "It's probably just catering to one small segment in the market. Generally, those people are wealthy."

City government is trying to encourage such developments downtown and elsewhere. Shuford said the city could require developers to include affordable housing, although that idea has been controversial when discussed by City Council in the past.

It is not clear whether the communities will eventually come to include affordable housing without nudging from city government, he said.

"In an area that was not as attractive as Asheville, I would think that would happen" just through market forces, he said.

Daniel Rodriguez, also an assistant professor of city and regional planning at UNC Chapel Hill, said his research shows residents of the communities



Yan Song

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