



INFILL DEVELOPERS STILL HAVE A NEED TO FILL TRINITY COMMON AT PARK AND PRINCETON WILL OFFER 4 HOUSES, A DUPLEX

Construction of Interstate 485 in Mecklenburg County is opening outlying land for new subdivisions, but not all residential developers are convinced everyone wants to buy a house and lot in the suburbs.

One niche group - the infill developer - is marching to a different drum.

Long-range, infill specialists - who build on vacant or underdeveloped lots in established neighborhoods - see a shift back toward the city's core as people tire of long commutes and time-consuming yard maintenance.

Even as Charlotte's economy slows, the niche is still showing strength. Residential developers are plugging away at small residential projects that fill gaps in the urban fabric.

One of the newest, Tuscan Development's Trinity Common, is a good example. It consists of four two-story houses and a three-story duplex ranging from \$320,000 to \$380,000 at the southeast corner of Park Road and Princeton Avenue.

Park Road, with easy access to uptown and Park Road Shopping Center, has been a hotspot for infill condominiums and houses during the past five years.

"We were familiar with the property and we always wondered why it hadn't been developed," said Ray Farris III, who owns Tuscan Development with James Cole. "There's an old house on the site that neighbors always called the frat house."

The City Council began encouraging infill development in the 1980s, but the trend didn't gain momentum until the early 1990s.

Architect Jim Gross launched one of the highest-profile projects in 1991: Dilworth Crescent, a community of 39 Georgetown-style houses on the old Temple Israel site off East Morehead Street.

He also converted a historic uptown department store building to Ivey's Town Homes and developed the Factory South loft condominiums in the old Lance Factory on South Boulevard.

Other developers picked up on the movement and began targeting older Charlotte neighborhoods such as Dilworth, Myers Park, Elizabeth and Eastover for infill housing projects.

Tuscan is partnering with Sagehorn & Co., the builder, on Trinity Common, which takes its name from Holy Trinity Catholic Middle School across the street.

The project is only a five minute walk to Freedom Park, about a mile from East Boulevard's restaurant and commercial cluster and about a mile from South End.

It will be developed on nearly an acre within the boundaries of the Freedom Park Neighborhood Association, but it also borders the Myers Park, Dilworth and Sedgefield neighborhoods.

"We view that corner as a gateway into the Freedom Park neighborhood," Farris said.

The buildings' stately brick exteriors, casement windows, doors and roof lines will be reminiscent of 18th-century American architecture, the developers say.

They compare the appearance to Dilworth Crescent and Queens West at East Boulevard and Queens Road West.

Trinity Common is being sold as individual homes, not condos. Homeowners will have a common area and courtyards with brick walls and wrought-iron gates. But they won't have any grass to mow.

Features include 10-foot ceilings on the first floor, hardwood floors, granite kitchen countertops, French doors, pocket gardens, intricate millwork and two-car garages.

Homes will range from 2,000 to 2,500 square feet. Floor plans vary, but Tuscan, which is handling sales, said pre-construction buyers can customize.

The project includes the old two-story "frat" house, which is being renovated and will be ready for occupancy in January.

Farris said construction on the five new homes should start in the next month or so and be completed in late spring.

Jimmy Flowers of The Nichols Co. represented Tuscan in the property acquisition. ColeJenest & Stone is handling civil engineering, site planning and landscape architecture services.

Farris and Cole are veteran infill developers. Perhaps their most visible project is Hawthorne Court, the multi-colored condominiums built on a former service station site at the Hawthorne Lane Bridge over Independence Freeway.

Among Tuscan's other projects are Tivoli in First Ward's Garden District, Kensington Court in Plaza-Midwood and Cedar Mill in Third Ward.

Developers believe the infill trend will continue for several reasons: Uptown's emerging cultural and entertainment amenities are encouraging people to move closer to the center city.

As traffic congestion gets worse people will move closer in to escape long commutes to work.

Newcomers from large urban centers will be receptive to living in higher-density communities.

Aging baby boomers are downsizing and seeking to reduce home maintenance responsibilities as the children leave home.

If you have a vacant parcel in your close-in neighborhood, you can bet an infill developer is keeping an eye on it.