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Mixed-use Village is also green

VANESSA WILLIS

Everything old is new again.

That's the idea driving the design of The Village at Robinson Farm, a retail and office development under construction at Rea Road and Williams Pond Lane. When it's completed in September, the 44,000-square-foot center's look will pay homage to the area's rural roots.

But many elements of the center's design are innovative and speak to the needs of the booming, upscale area. From showers for office tenants who jog or bike to work, to private restaurant patios set away from parking lots, it gives special consideration to the lifestyles of business owners and customers.

The Village also is one of the first mixed-use projects in the United States to earn a special "green" designation from the U.S. Green Building Council, says Jennifer Stanton, president of Advisory Services, a consulting firm working with landowner Jim Houser and developer Lat Purser & Associates.

"Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design" precertification honors projects designed to have a minimal environmental impact on their communities. The Village will feature low-flow plumbing, rain gardens that soak up stormwater, and paint and carpets that don't emit toxic fumes, Houser says.

Recycled brick and stone will be used and all of the exterior lighting will be shielded to reduce the center's contribution to light pollution in the area.

About 32,000 vehicles drive past the site daily, according to Lat Purser. It's unclear how the new center could affect that number, said Linda Durrett of the Charlotte Department of Transportation.

"This is a smaller center between Stonecrest and Blakeney, and we don't believe it will increase traffic in the area," Stanton says. "It actually might absorb some of that traffic... and the top floors of each building will be offices, and that generally means a lower impact."

Houser says they will add a deceleration lane on Rea Road leading to the center, and an extra traffic lane on a stretch of Ballantyne Commons Parkway at Elm Lane about a half-mile away.

Stanton also says the project also includes the addition of sidewalks along roads around the center to make it pedestrian friendly.

The seven acres where the Village is under construction have been in Houser's family for about 150 years (his mother was a Robinson). He asked architect Jim Williams of LS3P to give the project a historical feel. Williams also designed the Phillips Place shopping center and the Ballantyne Corporate Park.

Some members of the Robinson family still live close by.

"There are (already) plenty of Georgian brick buildings in south Charlotte," Stanton says. "We wanted the buildings to be authentic to history of the area and the look of the actual buildings that once stood on the site. We have replicated the look of the original general store at Robinson Farm that burned down during another one of our region's dry spells in October 1954."

Walter Stitt Robinson, Houser's grandfather, founded the store in 1900. Robinson died in 1956.

The other three Village buildings are the "barn," "farmhouse" and "stable." A bank or professional office could go into a smaller outparcel building.

The center's 9,000 square feet of office space is designed to cater to small business owners who "may now be operating out of their home and could bike, jog or walk to work from the surrounding neighborhoods," he says.

The Village also was designed to be anchored by four restaurants.

"We'll have the grease traps and other restaurant-specific elements in place to help our tenants avoid the hassle of having to do upfits later that could delay their opening time," says Steve Mitchener, retail vice president for Lat Purser.

Tenant information is not yet available, but Stanton said diners shouldn't expect duplicates of the larger restaurants available elsewhere in southern Mecklenburg County.

After polling the immediate community, Stanton says, "the most important thing that we realized was that our neighbors didn't want more generic, corporate-run chains. We made the decision to turn down quite a few lucrative offers from popular restaurant names that are popping up everywhere."

Tenant information is also not yet available for the retail shop spaces, Mitchener says. But the concepts could include a spa, hair and nail salons, home furnishings, an alteration shop with dry cleaning, optical office, and wireless phone providers. Clothing and shoe boutiques could also be part of the project.

Again, they're avoiding duplication of chains already available in the area to give the Village a more intimate feel, Stanton says.

The new center is just across Elm Lane from Camfield Corners, which is anchored by a Bi-Lo grocery store. It's also about a half-mile from Stonecrest at Piper Glen, a 420,000-square-foot "power" retail center on Rea Road near Interstate 485.

"We want to serve the needs of the typical South Charlotte resident: hard working families who never seem to have enough time," Stanton says. "We had in mind the place where a family would go for an evening stroll, bike to lunch or stop in after church."

ON THE RADAR

By the numbers

131,315 People living within a 5-mile radius

\$113,501 Average household income within 5 miles

\$5,524 Average amount spent on eating out by households within 1 mile of the Village

28,500 Number of office workers within a 5-mile radius

32,000 Average daily traffic count

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