



Fairview a fertile site for homebuilders

02:22 PM CDT on Monday, July 3, 2006

By STEVE BROWN / The Dallas Morning News

Fairview's motto is "Keeping it country."

But one look at a map shows why that's hard to do.

Wedged between Allen and McKinney on the east side of U.S. Highway 75, the Collin County town of 5,700 is next in line for a development boom.

Builders are already putting up new subdivisions lined with custom homes.

And starting next year work will begin on a 200-acre shopping center that's as big as some malls.

While the big city is knocking at Fairview's front door, city leaders say they want to keep the rural flavor for much of the town.

"We are trying to take advantage of the growth and protect ourselves at the same time," said Fairview City Manager John Godwin. "It looks like we are going to be able to do that."

Here's how.

Fairview plans to keep the east side of town countrified – large lots with big houses and room for a pony.

But Fairview is cranking up the density in the corridor between U.S. 75 and State Highway 5. Over 800 acres have been earmarked for shopping centers, office space, apartments, traditional single-family and more.

"If you are living two miles away (from U.S. 75) with your 3-acre lot and big house, the development on the other end of Fairview shouldn't affect you negatively," Mr. Godwin said. "It's one of the largest areas left for development this close in on a major thoroughfare."

That's why developer MGHerring Group decided to build its Village at Fairview shopping center at the northeast corner of Stacy Road and U.S. 75.

"The national retail tenants are learning very quickly where Fairview, Texas, is," said Gar Herring, MGHerring Group executive vice president. "We'll start construction in August 2006."

"We've picked up a lot of momentum not just on the retail side but incorporating mixed-uses with residential and office space."

The developer's 1 million-square-foot "lifestyle" retail center will have at least three major department stores, including Dillard's and Foley's.

"It will have a huge impact on the community," Mr. Godwin said. "People will be able to shop, eat and live there."

And for the first time, Fairview will have a commercial center.

Scattered origins

When the town was founded in 1958, the area was a scattering of farms, homes, schools and such.

"There was a store and a couple of churches – that was all there ever was here," Mr. Godwin said of the town that now includes about 10 square miles.

This year the first corner shopping strip opened its doors at Highway 5 and Stacy. The 18,500-square-foot retail complex contains a restaurant, cleaners and other shops.

About 400 single-family homes have been started in Fairview in the last year, according to housing analyst Residential Strategies. The town estimates that there are currently about 1,700 homes in the city.

The population is expected to almost double in the next four years.

Most of the buyers in Fairview are lured by the town's large lots, said Residential Strategies' Ted Wilson.

"I think what is driving the acre lot demand in the area is the fact that the upper price points are performing much better today – a lot of this being driven by relocation buyers," said Mr. Wilson, who said most of those large-lot homes in Fairview start at over \$300,000.

The sector west of Highway 5 is also attracting traditional suburban builders – including First Texas homes and Grand Homes – which are putting up houses priced from \$200,000 to just over \$300,000.

Apartment plans

"Along with that we have a number of apartment complexes planned," Mr. Godwin said. "And we have a condo builder that is working in planning and zoning on a project."

Developer Murl Richardson has owned land along the east side of U.S. 75 for about four years and is contemplating several developments.

The first phase of his Fairview Center project is a 12-acre medical and office complex just south of State Highway 121.

"We've really seen activity pick up" since MGHerring Group announced its big shopping center, Mr. Richardson said. "The land we have will be used mainly for multifamily [apartments] and office buildings."

With the future right of way for DART's light rail line running along Fairview's western border, Mr. Richardson is also optimistic about the location of his property.

"DART's a long way off, but it's part of what we are trying to accomplish," he said. "We want to create a sustainable central business district for Fairview instead of just more 1-acre single-family-home lots."

E-mail stevebrown@dallasnews.com