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Builders Plan 6,847 Houses in Wimauma

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WIMAUMA - South Hillsborough County is well known as a booming real estate market, and the latest hot spot seems to be the intersection of U.S. 301 and State Road 674.

County commissioners gave approval this week to minor changes to a 3,800-home project in that area originally approved 30 years ago.

Add that to the 2,200-home project a little to the west, the 750 houses to be built a little to the east, and the 97-home development — with some priced in the \$800,000 range — on a tract to the south. Mix in a Wal-Mart Superstore and you begin to get the picture that the Wimauma of today will be nothing like that of tomorrow.

Wimauma has remained essentially unchanged over the past several decades. Many people who move here came to enjoy the rural lifestyle. But the change isn't entirely unwelcome.

Pat Porter, a Wimauma resident for 20 years, is happy about having a Wal-Mart down the street from her home at the Church of God Campground off State Road 674.

She hopes the new houses come with more stores and services.

"There are lots of houses being built but I think we should have more commercial," she said. "We need banks, restaurants and gas stations. We have lots of migrants here and we need something to help them so they don't need to go all the way to Ruskin or Brandon to shop."

Porter also is concerned about the price of the new houses, some of which will sell for \$800,000 or more.

"I'm afraid if the economy goes bust that there will be a lot of people not able to make their house payments," she said.

Changing Landscapes

As long ago as 1975, there were plans to change the Wimauma landscape, when the county originally approved plans for 3,800 houses, 60 acres of commercial development and a 143-acre golf course on the southeast corner of U.S. 301 and S.R. 674.

But that development never got off the ground. Recently, however, the land was acquired by a new developer, Lennar Homes.

With the revisions, the new plan still calls for 3,800 houses on 794 acres at the southeastern corner of the busy intersection and 60 acres of commercial development, but plans for the golf course have been dropped.

Keith Brickleyer, an attorney representing Lennar Homes, said that although the developer is withdrawing plans for the golf course, there are no plans to seek more than 3,800 houses for the overall project, to be known as Sunshine Village. That's not the only project planned for the area.

Across the street from the Sunshine Village tract, preliminary work has begun on construction of a Wal-Mart Superstore, expected to open next summer. Just to the east of Sunshine Village, Centex Homes plans to build 750 houses on the former Sanwa Growers property. To the north of the Wal-Mart, GL Homes is building Valencia Lakes, an age-restricted community for those 55 and older with 2,900 houses.

Sheldon Swiger is a Wimauma native who said he's "kind of nervous" about all the new houses coming to town. He, too, is pleased about having a Wal-Mart nearby. He is also concerned about the traffic. "They need to widen U.S. 301 first before they build any more homes," he said.

More Houses Coming

Another large development with a Wimauma address is about ready to take shape on 932 acres on the west side of U.S. 301, on the former Diehl farm property. Beazer Homes plans to build 2,200 homes there.

That development will be called Belmont, said Beazer Homes president Ed Suchora. "We figure the area is big and wide open space, and lends itself to a horse theme," he said.

To the south of Sunshine Village, developer Prisa Group is planning 97 houses on 500 acres, with houses priced up to \$800,000. The gated community, called Lake Toscana, is the county's first conservation subdivision. The developer will put more than 50 percent of the land into conservation areas, allowing the houses to be clustered on smaller lots than the 5-acres allowed under the existing zoning.

Although the projects for the U.S. 301/State Road 674 area are making it a hot area for development, developments of similar scope are on the drawing boards or are under construction in other south county areas.