

Ambitious proposal -- Multi-use development proposal would add 950 dwellings to western Caledonia

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Racine Journal Times

January 10, 2006

CALEDONIA - The intersection of highways K and V now marks a country crossing in a farming area about midway between Interstate-94 and Franksville. Except for the paved roads, it probably looks much as it did a century earlier. But in the next several years the area immediately east of that crossing may be transformed into one of Racine County's largest developments - and one that foreshadows the future rather than preserving the past.

Legacy Development of Caledonia will soon seek village approval for Twelve Oaks, a mixed-use development that could easily reach \$300 million in market value. Twelve Oaks would include 850 to 950 dwellings, office space and about 272,000 square feet of retail space including a supermarket.

Moreover, unlike a typical subdivision, Twelve Oaks would be a New Urbanism development. It would be designed as a small community where people could find work, shopping, possibly a school, recreation and nature - all within walking distance.

"We're very interested in mediating suburban sprawl so that very valuable farmland is not swallowed up," said Linda Keane of Studio 1032 in Shorewood, whose firm worked on the master land plan for Twelve Oaks. "This is aimed at getting people to enjoy walking, enjoy being in nature, and not having long commutes."

"We're seeing the way we have developed really is not progressive, and it's not sustainable," Keane said.

Instead, this development aims to create a "walkable community," she said. For example, besides gathering different things that people need, Twelve Oaks would have sidewalks, which the village does not require.

"It's to promote the whole concept of 'walkability,'" said Legacy Development President and co-owner John Holding. "You have to have sidewalks."

Twelve Oaks, which Holding hopes to take to the Caledonia Plan Commission late next month, would be built on the 220-acre William Petersen farm and the 100-acre Charles Kuiper farm.

Legacy's tentative partner is Illinois-based Neumann Homes, which would build the residential portions. Neumann's owner, Ken Neumann, is a brother of former 1st District Congressman Mark Neumann.

The roughly 900 dwellings would consist of about 70 percent single-family homes and about 30 percent multifamily housing, Holding said. Most would be owner-occupied, selling at about \$250,000 to \$500,000 each.

Keane said the houses would not all look like carbon copies of each other. Her firm studied the region's architecture and proposed about five different styles, using types that naturally cropped up over the decades.

Besides the owner-occupied housing, Twelve Oaks would likely have apartments for seniors. "That mix of age groups is so important," Keane said - for example, so residents with children can have retired people nearby as baby-sitters.

New stores, school

Twelve Oaks would be constructed in five one-year phases, likely starting early in 2007, Holding said. There is enough sewer capacity to get it going, but its completion would require extension of sewer and water into the area. Holding was asked if doing so could open the door to other, less-desirable development in a part of the village that was supposed to retain its rural character. "What you're looking at is exactly what the town has proposed in its plan for that neighborhood area," he replied. "In their land use plan, this is what it shows. Anyone else who continues this also has to abide by the village guidelines."

The development would preserve more than 50 acres of wetlands and marshes and a stand of mature oak trees, Holding said. It would place an educational ecology center near one of those areas. And Holding envisions community gardens or an apple orchard on what is now the Petersen farm.

One of the intriguing aspects of the firm's conceptual plan is to build a new school in Twelve Oaks. Holding said he has not yet approached Racine Unified School District, but he envisions an elementary school - possibly as a charter school.

"(A school) used to be one of the cornerstones of an urban development," said Keane. "Development has really been segregated since World War II. ... It puts us in cars all the time."

To ease the transition between highway traffic and the development, Legacy proposes a roundabout at both ends on Highway K. The idea is to slow traffic entering what will be an area of many pedestrians, without the backups that occur at a red light or the high driving speeds with a green light.

Holding said he hopes to land an anchor company for the office space he wants to build at Twelve Oaks. However, even without one, the development would include office space.

The retail area, called Trillium Commercial Center, would feature a supermarket. "There really is nothing out this way," Holding said.

The commercial area also would have other shops "you would normally see in a town center," he said. He maintained that Legacy and/or the village could control the types of retailers there by zoning and other means.

For recreation, the plan lays out a tennis/pool club, baseball/soccer fields and sidewalks to encourage people to walk, jog, bike or in-line skate to neighborhood destinations, "thus eliminating unnecessary traffic and increasing a sense of community," Holding said.

Despite the immense changes that Legacy hopes to bring to that area, it would not completely lose its connection with the past. Holding wants to restore the 1880s Petersen farmhouse and turn it into a bed-and-breakfast inn.