

Project Could Help Revise Wilmore

Boulevard Centro plans 46 townhomes

DEVELOPMENT



Doug Smith

Since South End revitalization began nearly 15 years ago, Wilmore leaders have searched for a keystone project that would funnel the momentum westward to their adjoining neighborhood.

Now it looks like they have one: Wilmore Walk, a 46-unit townhome development.

The Wilmore Neighborhood Association is teaming the developer David Furman's Boulevard Centro to reclaim about 3.5 blighted acres on both sides of West Worthington Avenue.

The dead-end street is across South Tryon Street from MECA Properties new Camden Square Village Commercial Condominiums, which anchor the western fringe of South End.

Wilmore, a close-in neighborhood that dates to 1914, is separated by South Tryon Street from South End, where many old industrial buildings have been restored for offices, condos, shops and restaurants.

When residential development spills across Tryon at Wilmore Walk, neighborhood residents could help create a pedestrian bridge through Camden Square Village to the trolley line, light-rail transit service and shopping in South End.

People crossing Tryon from South End today, "enter a deep, dark hole," on West Worthington, Furman said.

He said the dead end has harbored criminal activity and raised major safety concerns among neighborhood leaders.

"We wanted Boulevard Centro to be a company that helps revitalize neighborhoods, and we let Wilmore figure out how we could play a role as architects and developers," Furman said.

Residents pinpointed West

Worthington as a starting point.

Boulevard Centro is doing the townhome project, valued at \$4.8 million, at cost without taking any profit, Furman said.

He said planning and preparation has taken more than four years and included almost \$1 million in loan assistance from public and private agencies.

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Housing Partnership and Bank of America Community Development lent money for land acquisition. And the city's neighborhood development division provided a loan to help eliminate the dead end by extending Worthington west to Mint Street.

The final and most time-consuming step, Furman said, was getting state permission under wetlands guidelines to develop over a creek on the property.

With that done and a building permit in hand, he said, a first phase of 22 units could be started by early summer.

The two- and three-bedroom townhomes will sell for \$89,000 to \$109,000 and adhere to affordability guidelines.

Catherine Mitchell, who is handling sales at Boulevard Centro, said only families earning 80 percent or less of the area median income would qualify.

She said the maximum allowable income would be about \$46,160 for a family of three; \$41,000 for a couple and \$35,920 for a single person.

Furman said, "We want to create opportunities for those who need it and at the same time create stakeholders in Wilmore."

Affordability was an issue

because Wilmore has begun to attract urban pioneers who have purchased and remodeled houses in the working-class neighborhood.

Neighborhood leaders are wary because revitalization typically causes housing prices to escalate, often forcing long-time residents to move out.

With a project like Wilmore Walk, "you can establish stakeholders who will be nailed down when the revitalization steamroller moves," Furman said.

Darius Johnson, president of the Wilmore Neighborhood Association, said residents also wanted to make sure the new townhomes blend with the character of the neighborhood.

Furman, whose architectural firm designed the funky Silo Lofts in Forth Ward and Gateway Lofts in Third Ward, said Wilmore Walk sticks to the neighborhood's predominantly bungalow style architecture.

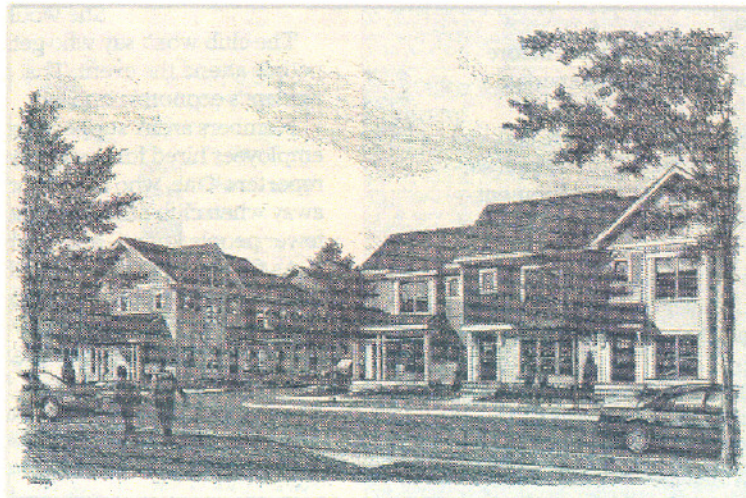
Units have front porches, columns, windows and roof lines resembling older houses along West Boulevard, Kingston Avenue and Park Avenue.

Townhomes, ranging from 959 to 1,161 square feet, will be built close to the curb to encourage street-level activity. Many will have front-door entrances off West Worthington.

Each townhome will have a private, enclosed courtyard with a concrete patio.

Other features include 9-foot ceilings, wooden floors at the entry foyer, powder rooms on the living level, attic storage space and thermal-insulated windows.

Furman said general contractor Carocon Corp. will start construction when about half of the first-phase units are under contract. The initial "introductory" prices will be raised after construction starts, he said.



BOULEVARD CENTRO RENDERING

Two- and three-bedroom townhomes in Wilmore Walk on West Worthington Avenue will sell for \$89,900 to \$109,900.