

Moving East Into The Near West End

“Before you know it, Richmond’s West End will extend to Charlottesville.”

Pictured: Reynolds Crossing

by Steve Cook

That’s the popular sentiment among many, and understandably so, given the ongoing westward commercial and residential expansion, which has thus far spread into eastern Goochland County.

However, not all are of that opinion. Dr. Morton Gulak, PhD, an associate professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, in their Urban Studies and Planning Department, says “We can’t keep going further and further and further (west).”

Interestingly, while development continues at a frantic pace in the far West End, Gulak notes a move back towards town. “What’s happening are a couple of things,” Gulak explains. One of those things, according to Gulak, is that “developers have finally realized that folks closer into the city have available money for expenditures, and they don’t want to drive all the way out to the (far) West End to spend it.”

Also, he says, businesses are taking advantage of the lower land cost in the near West End. “This land also offers easy access both to downtown as well as the far West End. It offers the ease of going either way,” he says.

Gulak says empty nesters are beginning to look at what’s available in the near West End. “They want to be closer in to the city,” he says. “They’re discovering that urban living offers its own unique lifestyle.”

Morton Gulak says part of the attraction of a more urban lifestyle is a greater sense of community, which can result in a perception of greater

security. “When you live in the city, you’re closer to your neighbors. People will watch out for you. They know who walks on the block.” In line with Gulak’s conclusions, the near West End of Henrico County is indeed experiencing a remarkable revitalization.

BACK TO A “SIMPLER TIME”

“Step out your front door and into a simpler time,” says Wayne Chasen, President and Chief Executive Officer for Gumenick Properties. Chasen is describing the lifestyle residents of Gumenick’s proposed Staples Mill Centre will enjoy.

Staples Mill Centre, is a 79.5-acre project to be developed along Staples Mill Road. Upon completion, the cost of all buildings and improvements is estimated to be at about 434 million. The community, will drastically alter the face of this parcel in the near West End. The Centre will be built on a site formerly occupied by Suburban Apartments, a post-World War II neighborhood built to meet the housing needs of returning veterans. After 60 years of continuous use, the now-demolished community was reaching the end of its useful life.

The residential component of this mixed-use development will feature single-family homes, townhouses and condominiums for sale, as well as apartment communities. Additionally, there will be office and retail space.

According to Chasen, Staples Mill Centre will “look, feel, and function much like a small, close-

knit American neighborhood of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.” Public space will include a two-acre water feature, designed to increase social activity throughout the community.”

IN THE ZONE

Mark Strickler, Director of community revitalization for Henrico County, says the county is happy to see the Staples Mill Centre project. Strickler, whose department oversees the county’s enterprise zones, works with businesses within those zones to help improve the appearance of their buildings’ facades, as well as to encourage new businesses to locate within the zone. Henrico’s western enterprise zone extends from the city line, along Broad Street to Glenside Drive. It also incorporates a portion of Staples Mill Road, including the Staples Mill Centre parcel.

“You want the commercial corridors to be vibrant,” Strickler says, “You want them to look good, as they’re the front door to the adjacent neighborhoods.” Through the program, both the county and the state offer a variety of incentives to businesses in an effort to encourage growth and renovation within the zone.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR THE NEAR WEST END?

Further development east of Glenside Drive, includes the new Reynolds Crossing project adjacent to the Philip Morris headquarters at Interstate 64 and West Broad Street. In 2001, members of the Reynolds family purchased this site,



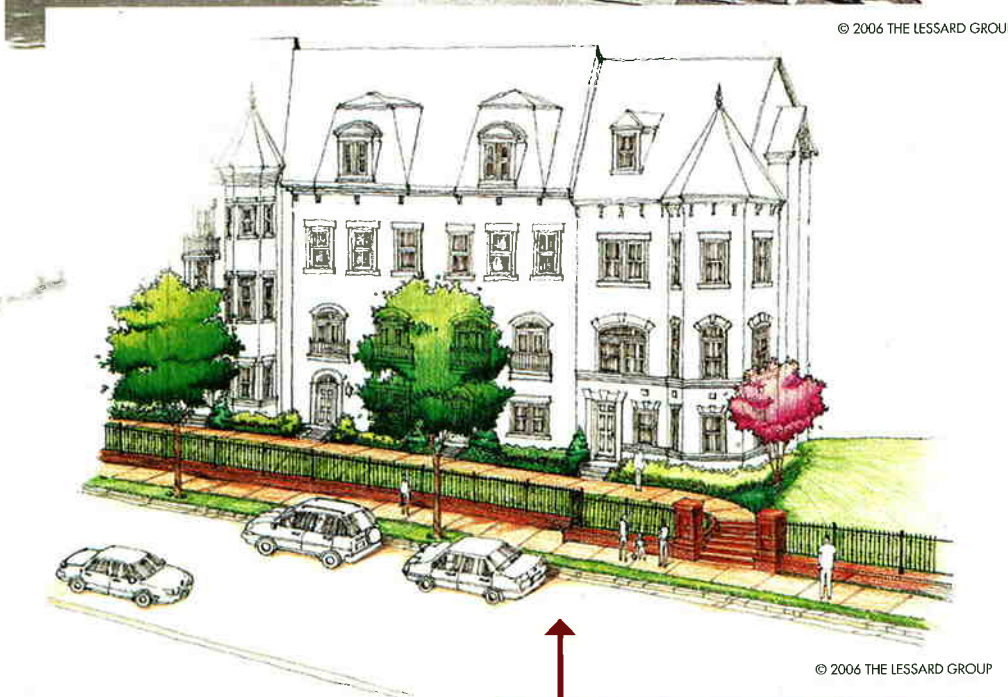
which Reynolds Metals had sold to Alcoa Aluminum in the late nineties.

Randy Reynolds, Sr., one of the owners of the property, says its chief appeal is accessibility. "It's extremely accessible and convenient," Reynolds says. "We see this as a site where people can work, enjoy other services (on site), and then get home very quickly. This site is within fifteen minutes of virtually any part of the metro area."

He says that a 100,000-square-foot medical office building is being developed there in association with Bon Secours. Plans call for an additional 200,000-square-foot office building, a hotel, as well as retail and restaurant space. "It's too early to announce any specific tenants," Reynolds says. "But the development has been very well received in the community."

"SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL"

In addition to Staples Mill Centre, Gumenick Properties is also developing an upscale residential community, Monument Square, in the 5200 block of Monument Avenue, near Willow Lawn Shopping Center. The company's website www.monumentstyle.com describes the project as a "respectful reinterpretation of Richmond's ar-



Monument Square - Townhome style

chitectural heritage," adding that "Monument Square recaptures the charm and craftsmanship of a bygone era." The mansion- and townhome-styled condominiums will offer residents such amenities as an outdoor pool and clubhouse with, game room, fitness center, and conference center."

Ed Crews, Gumenick Properties' communication director, says, "We're very bullish on Henrico County. We're particularly excited about the changes occurring along Staples Mill Road and Monument Avenue. What you're seeing is a renaissance... one that will transform this area into something very special." ❖

Gumenick Properties envisions Staples Mill Centre as a mixed-use community with a vibrant feel. The neighborhood will include single-family homes, townhomes and condominiums for sale. It also will have apartments and office and retail space. The parcel covers about 79.5 acres. It enjoys an excellent location on Staples Mill Road between Broad Street and Interstate-64 in Henrico County. Staples Mill Centre will have the feel of a late 19th century or early 20th century neighborhood. In addition, the company will apply sound land planning principles to produce a new community with an old fashioned sense of warmth and place.

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