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## It Takes Vision

*Mixed-development and urban attitude may be the missing link Jenks' "urbanization"*

By Mike Easterling

Many supporters of the PLANiTULSA document now being considered by the Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission are hoping those proposed changes will help transform the kind of development the city experiences during the next few decades.

But if those PLANiTULSA enthusiasts are really curious about what the future holds, they might want to examine a planned project in Jenks that bills itself as the first mixed-use development in the state.

Preliminary site work on the 30-acre, 750,000-square-foot Village on Main will begin throughout the next month at a location just north and west of the Oklahoma Aquarium on the west bank of the Arkansas River and south of the Riverwalk Crossing. In many ways, the project seems to epitomize a number of elements that are key to the PLANiTULSA recommendations -- higher-density, more sustainable development where uses are not segregated from each other as they are with traditional zoning.

The pedestrian-friendly project will include a 120-room hotel, 150 residential units, a grocery store, a 24-hour workout facility, office space, retail space, restaurants, sidewalk cafes and a village square, and will feature wide sidewalks covered by 500 to 600 new trees. Designs call for nearly one-third of the development to be devoted to green space, while a landscaped amphitheater-type facility is under consideration. A 22,000-square foot medical clinic adjacent to the project will be open in May, one month ahead of schedule.

The entire site is designed to serve as the first place in the state where people can live, work and play in the same location -- perhaps the main tenant of a relatively new development concept called smart growth that evolved as a response to sprawl. The project will include a number of sustainable features designed to lessen its carbon footprint, including building layouts that take advantage of natural light, storm water retention projects and landscaping positioned to cut the costs of utilities.

"We wanted to do something different here," said Bob Eggleston, the owner's representative and a partner in the project. "We could have made a lot more money by doing a big-box development, but we wanted to do a smart-growth development -- although I must admit that initially we didn't know what that was. We had to look it up."

If the concept sounds familiar, that's because it is. Eggleston -- who served as construction manager during the building of the BOK Center -- is one of the principals in One Developers LLC, the group that is planning on constructing the \$38 million One Place multi-use development to the east of the arena. One Place will feature a hotel, residential units, restaurants and office and retail space.

But that project will be dwarfed by the \$100 million Village on Main, which has been in the planning stages for much longer. The principal developer for the project is Duane Phillips.

Eggleston said his group has hired the highly regarded Sasaki Associates Inc. out of Boston to put together the master plan for the Village on Main. The company has completed master plans for similar projects in cities around the world, including the Olympic Green for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China.

"Instead of us trying to second guess what's going to work in Tulsa, we thought, 'Why not go out to the guys who do it every day?'" Eggleston said.

He said project developers are envisioning making the Village on Main a destination, a place where mothers with strollers can spend the day without fear of being run over by an aggressive motorist but also a place that will attract out-of-state visitors. The site's attractiveness will be enhanced by the construction of a low-water dam on the river within the next three to five years, he said, effectively making the waterfront a lake.

The epicenter of the project, Eggleston said, will be the intersection of Riverfront Drive and Aquarium Place, where the village square will be located. That site will be overlooked by the hotel, office space, retail space and a restaurant, making it a place of constant activity, he said. The development will feature 2,500 parking spaces, both surfaced and structured, according to Eggleston.



They Get It. "It's a lifestyle change," said Jenks City Manager Mike Tinker. "This is a more urban style of living . . . That kind of development is needed in the southern part of Tulsa County."



And much of the development will be serviced by what Eggleston calls the largest wireless Internet "cloud" in the state. Developers plan to offer free public Web access along the development's main corridor in an effort to foster constant activity.

When Phillips and Eggleston went public with their plans last year, they met a considerable amount of skepticism from some observers -- not just because of the nature of the development but also because of the rapidly declining economy.

"When we first announced this project, people said, 'Have you read the newspapers?'" Eggleston said. "But now people see the marketplace improving. There's a need for mixed use."

Eggleston backed that up by saying the development already has secured commitments from tenants to use 210,000 square feet of the Village on Main's space, including a healthy, niche market-type grocer and a hotel. That's almost a third of the available space in the development's plan, although Eggleston said another 200,000 square feet could be added if demand dictates.

"We have not had to sell this," he said. "It sold us. Ninety percent of what we have commitments for, people called us."

Eggleston said he's even turned down some retailers he didn't consider appropriate for the project.

"I've gotten half a dozen calls from people wanting to put a big box in," he said. "I just tell them no. There's no discussion."

The Village on Main received the approval of the Jenks City Council in June with virtually no opposition from the public, according to Jenks City Manager Mike Tinker. The project's impact on sales tax receipts and the ripple effect it is likely to have in bringing other investment to Jenks are two of its most obvious advantages for the city, but he believes the Village on Main will result in a significant quality-of-life improvement for residents.

"It's a lifestyle change," he said. "This is a more urban style of living, something that's been slow to come to the middle of the United States ... That kind of development is needed in the southern part of Tulsa County."

Tinker was particularly pleased by the inclusion of Sasaki Associates in the project.

"Bringing Sasaki into the picture has changed the dynamics of it," he said, describing the firm's penchant for visionary approaches. "It's that thinking that Sasaki's brought to it that's made it rise higher than it initially started out as."

Eggleston and Tinker said their two entities worked closely on the project from its inception, avoiding the kind of misunderstandings that could have delayed the development and wasted money. Both described the city of Jenks as a virtual partner in the Village on Main, though Tinker added, "That partnership doesn't mean (the city) rolls over and plays dead. But that partnership is a good, working partnership."

Eggleston said he appreciates the willingness of city officials to listen to unusual ideas -- something that has come up quite a bit, given the unique nature of the development.

"There's nothing we can say to the city of Jenks -- no matter how crazy or out of the box -- that's a no," he said. "It's a 'Let's see.' The city of Jenks is truly a partner, and they get it."

In return, the city's economy will be transformed by the development, he said, noting that Jenks provided no economic incentives for the Village on Main, though the site is within a tax increment finance district.

Eggleston hopes to tie the development into other attractions along the river. He said the Village on Main group is involved in talks with the Creek Nation about the possibility of running a water taxi from the River Spirit Casino to the development.

Throughout the next several weeks, Eggleston said work on the development's roads and utilities will begin. He estimated the project would be completed in 2015. He acknowledged that's a long time away, but he said he's anxious to get started.

"Lots of people talk about it, lot of people dream about it, but it just takes a few brave developers to make it happen," he said. "I can already picture myself walking down here, walking on a trail on a sunny afternoon. This is exciting and fun. We're very passionate about this and want to make it happen."