

New subdivisions fill housing demand, fight urban sprawl

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Eaglewood Retreat is James Island's newest subdivision in a community where space for residential development is dwindling.

Located off Fort Johnson Road, beside the soccer fields of the James Island Youth Club, the 16-acre Eaglewood Retreat will consist of 64 residential units, including single-family homes, townhouses and cottages. Prices for single-family homes, which are about 1,900 square feet, start at \$310,000. The townhouses range from about 1,600 square feet to 1,900 square feet and start at \$265,000. Cottages span between 2,200 square feet and 2,300 square feet and cost between \$350,000 and \$360,000. All units have three bedrooms.

Roads for the subdivision are already constructed. Home building will begin by summer.

This development is the latest Lowcountry example of infill residential development, which is land development within rather than outside of a metropolitan area. While this type of development is ongoing, so is development of large plots of land in the far reaches of the tri-county area.

Eaglewood Retreat is a joint venture among James Island Associates, Raleigh, N.C.-based EYC Companies and The Kalikow Group of Westbury, N.Y. West Ashley-based landscape architecture firm HLA Inc. designed the development, North Carolina architecture firm Narmoor Wright designed the residential units and Landura Homes Inc. of Summerville is marketing the subdivision.

Last year, The Beach Co. launched its Longborough subdivision in an area on the Charleston peninsula that once contained low-income housing. The Noisette Co.'s redevelopment plans for the former Navy base in North Charleston is an infill initiative.

Experts say developers in the Lowcountry and across the nation are turning increasingly to infill projects because available "outside" land is growing scarce due to urban sprawl and environmental restrictions.

"You have to work with what's available," says Barry Whalen, HLA Inc.'s senior vice president.

Eaglewood Retreat features three pockets of residential units. One will be built around a community pavilion, including a swimming pool, and the other around a pond. The architectural style of both residential pockets will be what Whalen calls "neo-traditional." The third will be a strip of tree-shaded, Lowcountry-style homes with porches and will look similar to those in Wagner Terrace and Longborough, according to Whalen. A boulevard with live oaks will be the development's entrance. Single-family homes will include attached garages while townhouses will have detached garages.

“It will be a socially connected neighborhood,” explains Whalen. “The pavilion, the swimming pool and the pond will be gathering places.”

While infill development is practically the only option developers have left on built-up James Island, rural Berkeley County is gearing up for growing pains from new subdivisions being planned on a triangle of land east of Interstate 26, north of U.S. Highway 17A and extending to U.S. Highway 176.

The 4,900-acre Sheep Island tract, being developed by Crescent Resources, a real estate subsidiary of North Carolina utility giant Duke Energy, will contain about 13,000 residential units. Charleston developer Ben Gramling’s 2,000-acre Cane Bay Plantation tract will hold some 4,500 residences and the 3,000-acre Herrin tract, named for a local developer, about 8,000 residences. The subdivisions will include single-family homes, condominiums, townhouses and apartments, plus offices, light industry and parks and open spaces, says County Supervisor Jim Rozier.

Construction, beginning with a 1,500-student high school in the Cane Bay subdivision, will begin this fall. These developments will be built out over the next 25 years.

Although the subdivisions will replace timberland, they will be mixed-use “smart-growth” communities in which residents can work, live, play, go to school and shop, Rozier says. Such self-contained communities are designed to limit urban sprawl.

To limit the forthcoming subdivisions’ population density, only about three houses per acre will be built compared with the 10 houses per acre Berkeley County allowed until about five months ago, when the county took steps to control density, Rozier emphasizes. Additionally, 37% of Berkeley County, including wetlands and forests, is protected from development.

The Lowcountry is the nation’s “select destination” for people relocating from the North, the West and Florida, notes Rozier, explaining the tri-county area’s robust housing market.

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