

DIMENSIONS



SMART GROWTH ACHIEVEMENTS

(Lord, Todd. "Pioneering Change." MBA Dimensions April 2006: Vol. 14, No. 4)

The Master Builder's Association (MBA) of Pierce County is truly the pioneer of change and a catalyst for addressing the needs of our industry and the future of our communities.

Thus far, the year has brought a host of new development issues, policies, challenges and changes that MBA staff, I and dedicated members are ready and committed to continue to tackle.

I want to take a moment to look at our industry in a broader perspective to point out what we are doing right in our quest to overcome long-range challenges we face. The rapid emergence of urban development, including urban infill, is clearly a response to the lack of available land supply set aside for residential development. The presence of large-scale master plans, once the housing supply backbone for Pierce County in the 1980's and 1990's, is now considered to be on the endangered species list. The traditional single family detached subdivisions with 100+ total lots is quickly facing extinction within the GMA boundaries of Pierce County.

I believe that there are two distinct approaches to this density challenge for developers: first, creating new urban lifestyle opportunities and second, creating affordable (and by necessity creative) single family home options while using less land.

Let's talk about what we're doing right when it comes to density. I'd like to highlight two projects: McCarver Village by O'Connor and Associates in Tacoma, and Alicia Meadows Townhomes, by Alicia Meadows LLC, managed by Reich Construction in South Hill.

The Urban Approach

The cityscape of downtown Tacoma is drastically changing. It is hard to imagine what the skyline will look like in 2007, let alone 5 or 10 years from now. Vacant lots and formerly dilapidated properties are being developed into beautiful and modern condominiums and townhouses. Major catalysts for downtown residential development and growth include the University of Washington Tacoma Campus, Museum of Glass, Union Station, and the Washington State History Museum. These large projects were the source of much more economic revitalization (both commercial and residential) in the downtown vicinity.

We are now seeing the benefits of another major catalyst, the 10-year tax abatement program, state legislation put in place to encourage residential development in underdeveloped districts throughout Tacoma. Thea's Landing, located next door to the Glass Museum, was a pioneering project for urban housing in downtown Tacoma, and it took advantage of this tool. Before that project, there was little new market rate residential development.

McCarver Village Townhouses (Downtown Tacoma)

Tom O'Connor of O'Connor and Associates is one MBA member who focuses on promoting densification through celebrating the urban lifestyle. In fact, urban infill in downtown Tacoma

is the primary focus of O'Connor and Associates. His company is dedicated to reclaiming areas that were previously considered undesirable.

McCarver Village will encompass 3 to 4 acres in downtown Tacoma by the time it is complete. Phase I of the project was completed in 2004, and was at 100% occupancy faster than anyone could anticipate. Phase II of the project is currently underway, and 14 new townhouses will be completed featuring 3 different floor plans by Architect Paul Casey of The Casey Group. Plans range from 1445 sq ft to 1645 sq ft with prices starting in the mid \$300's. The completion date for Part 1 of Phase II is anticipated near the end of May 2006. O'Connor and Associates anticipates that Part 2 of Phase II will begin development within the next few months, and be on the market by end of 2006. These are wonderful townhouses with great amenities and also feature the 10-year tax abatement. With bright exterior colors and interesting floor plans, this project is adding great value to the hillside of downtown Tacoma.

The Affordability Approach

As we well know, South Hill is one of the fastest growing regions in Pierce County. Young families and singles comprise much of the home buying market, and affordability for first-time home buyers is a priority. The South Hill commercial areas have been welcoming new businesses to create a positive sense of community.

Alicia Meadows (South Hill)

When Alicia Meadows was in the planning stages, the developer anticipated the new off site amenities and businesses that would benefit the residents, and would add sustained value to their new homes. At the same time, Alicia Meadows had to comply with site design requirements adopted in Pierce County in response to the GMA and the South Hill community plan. It takes patience, creativity and smart forward planning to provide affordable homes to Pierce County residents while also meeting current and always changing development regulations.

Alicia Meadows Townhomes is a new community located on 6.77 acres in the heart of Puyallup's South Hill. When completed, Alicia Meadows will comprise 91 two-story residences, achieving a density on a commercially zoned property of 13.44 units per acre, 37 of which have been built (the new owners are already moving in) and 63 sold. All of the homes are three to four bedrooms, ranging from 1,293 to 1,413 square feet, and there are five different floor plans to choose from, thanks to Architect Bob Mickey of Northwest Home Designing, Inc. Prices start in the low \$180,000s. The Alicia Meadows community has two open-space park areas and is fully landscaped; the low-maintenance building exteriors are designed to lower homeowners association expenses.

These two projects utilize just some of the ideas being explored by MBA members to achieve necessary density. Over time, as traditional Pierce County residential land use becomes impossible due to limited land supply, urban infill will become the norm rather than the

exception for our members. Local jurisdictions should be working with developers to help the public accept the new look of Pierce County and its cities.

I would like to invite you to join me for a great opportunity to learn more about urban infill and creative density solutions. MBA is hosting its 3rd Annual Housing Forum on April 27th at the Tacoma Rhodes Center beginning at 8 a.m., and the program will feature state and national speakers discussing the good and the bad of urban infill. If you cannot attend, be sure to check out our website at www.mbapierce.com in the days following to view the presentations for yourself.