

The Second Front Page

The Changing Face of Manchester

Development in Manchester Township

- by Marsha Johnson Chartrand

Change and growth don't happen over night, but we are seeing much change in our local landscape. Four new residential developments in Manchester Township have been started over the past year. According to Mike Fusilier, Chairman of the Manchester Township Planning Commission, we can expect to see more changes in the coming months and years.

"We're seeing larger amounts of traffic through our township," says Fusilier. While the development is happening in small pockets, and mainly on the north side of the township, it has greatly impacted both farm land and the quality of life in Manchester Township. "Hopefully we can keep the small town atmosphere; the problem is that farm land is disappearing rapidly."

New state laws have increased the amount of land splits and smaller parcels of land are being sold. "We can't really tell people what to do with their land," explains Fusilier. "Farmers don't have a retirement plan - their land is their retirement." When that time comes, the land has increasingly been sold off, not as farm land, but as residential property. Fusilier indicated that in the past 15 years, an equal number of farms have been lost in the township, and total farm acreage will continue to decrease. At this time there are 5-6 full time farmers remaining in Manchester Township.

"We walk a fine line here [as the Planning Commission]," he says. "We want to keep the area looking nice and maintain a rural atmosphere." But, he indicates, the growth is coming and it's not likely to stop any time soon.

Yet the people who want to move to the country don't always understand - or appreciate - that some of the same qualities which make the rural atmosphere so appealing can also create unique living conditions. "As a farmer, I

know there is a window for doing my work," says Fusilier. "That can mean you're out until all hours on your machinery. Or it might be time to spread manure." Those who move to the country need to remember that the farmers - and the sights, sounds and even the smells that come with farming are part and parcel of living in the country. A balance must be maintained, and peaceful co-existence is possible.

And speaking of peaceful coexistence, it is inevitable that we recognize the strain on local resources, that will be created as the community continues to grow and develop. "This will heavily impact the schools, of course," Fusilier begins. "It will also become a strain on our resources such as the library, and police and fire protection." It will also create a demand for more products and services to be offered locally, so it will affect the Village's downtown businesses.

Does Fusilier see commercial development coming to Manchester Township? "Not much. Our philosophy is to keep it near town or inside the Village. We would like the Village to take care of commercial development," Fusilier indicated. "We don't want strip development. With the industrial park at the edge of the village, and in the Township, we may see some changes."

Local Developers At Work

At least four new residential developments are underway in Manchester Township. On West Austin Road, at the old "Parr 3" homestead, 26 parcels, of at least ten acres each, are about half sold. On Lamb Road, a smaller development is beginning with three lots sold and five remaining. These parcels average slightly over two acres apiece. On Sharon Hollow Road, just south of Austin, two different developers are at work within a few hundred yards of each other. In all, about thirty housing

Change is coming. We have to prepare for it and plan for it, instead of letting it plan for us.

lots have been created in this area.

Each of these developments are being created from what is - or was - essentially farm land. The West Austin Road property was traditionally used as hunting land, but some of it was also used agriculturally.

On West Austin, Chuck Beck is developing the old Parr 3 property. A private road will be paved within the next two weeks. Underground utilities are completed and he hopes to sell the remainder of the property parcels to interested buyers.

His development has few restrictions, other than to provide an assurance that the property will continue to look just about the way it does now. "We'd like to perpetuate an environmentally friendly atmosphere," explains Beck. The private road, named Timberlake Road, wanders and weaves two miles, to a dead end at the back of the property.

Beck stresses that this is not a "subdivision." It's more eclectic; it doesn't have a name or slogans just beautiful home sites. And his clients are "building beautiful homes," he adds. Some are in excess of 5,000 square feet, and some are less than 2,000. All are being built by privately contracted builders, although each site plan is subject to the development's architectural review committee. "There are no requirements for size, shape or style," explains Beck. "But appearance-wise, we want to be sure to avoid a detriment of value to the other homes around it." With over 20 years of experience in developing proper-

ties, Beck brought some unique ideas to this piece of property.

Part of Beck's plan when creating this development was to build a road which creates home sites as square as possible. Avoiding lots which are 300 feet wide and a quarter mile deep, he has also maintained the natural contours and features of this beautiful piece of property (including a 30 acre lake and the old hunting area), and as a result, the properties are situated so that from one house, you will only be able to see two or three other homes at a time. You won't look out and see cookie-cutter homes surrounding yours.

There are currently three houses under construction in this development, in addition to the homestead house. Properties range from \$45-95,000. For information on property in this development, call Charles Beck & Co. Realtors at 428-1848.

Just off Lamb Road, a few miles west, Jay Davis of Davis Excavating has created a private road known as Sunset Drive and is doing his own contracting for the eight homes which will eventually occupy the lots, which average a little more than two acres. A ninth, 25-acre plot, also sits on Sunset Drive. Again, this development doesn't have a name or slogan, and is a private residential area. One home is started in this development and two more are in the planning stages.

Homes on Sunset Drive will vary from a minimum of 1500 square feet for a single story home, to a minimum of 1800 square feet for a two

story home.

Also an experienced contractor, Davis hopes to create some quality private homes which will be both affordable and attractive. There are five lots left to purchase in the Sunset Drive location, which range between \$33-36,000. Davis can be reached at home, 4287369, or at his office, 4281768, for more information on purchasing property.

Can We Grow and Stay the Same?

As Manchester and the surrounding townships experience rapid growth, the challenge will be to retain the small, Midwestern, rural kind of community that we have become used to. Growth presents many opportunities for change and yet, how much change do we want to see in the face of our village and the outlying community?

All things considered, most people believe our community works pretty well just the way it is. How much change do we want to see? Are new and bigger schools on the horizon? A library which is supported by the entire district, rather than a single Township footing the majority of the bills? A larger police and fire department? More stores? Where will they be located? Do we want to attract more industry to expand our tax base and support some of these increased services? We must face these questions, and many more, as the expansion westward in Washtenaw County finally reaches the fringes of our small village.

As Fusilier says, "All the townships, as well as the Village government, need to work together at keeping the town thriving." Expanding development doesn't have to mean strip malls, increased industry and a different sort of Manchester than we have now. Careful planning on the part of our local governments and planning commissions will help make the shape of things to come, a shape that we can live with.

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