

Developers plan almost 3 million square feet of commercial space in Indiantown

By KATE GRUSICH
kate.grusich@scripps.com
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It doesn't take much time to determine where to shop and eat in Indiantown.

Fact is, the single-traffic signal hamlet has few options in the way of dining and entertainment, other than a string of gas stations, taquerias and restaurants along Warfield Boulevard.

But as several developers weave their way through the county's review process to bring thousands of new homes and millions of square feet of commercial and industrial space to town, excitement over the rural community's future is starting to build.

And many think that will include a pedestrian-oriented mix of shops, offices and restaurants along the main drag, as well as mini-commercial centers in the proposed residential developments scattered throughout town.

"We've tried to be in proactive in having a vision for Indiantown," said Brian Powers, chairman of the Indiantown Neighborhood Advisory Committee. "We tried to break things out, where you have the right types of retail uses; like a downtown shopping district. It's our vision to have one where you can park and walk from one place to another."

While a vibrant and bustling entertainment strip remains a pipe-dream at the moment, local leaders think it will become a reality down the road.

Indiantown has seen little growth in past decades. But with Scripps Research Institute choosing Jupiter for its Florida operations and California's Burnham Institute discussing expansion into Port St. Lucie, the tranquil community is poised to profit from its central location.

More than a dozen development projects are on the table, featuring about 6,000 new homes and almost 3 million square feet of commercial and industrial space. And proximity to biotech isn't the only factor fueling the development frenzy.

Indiantown's affordable land, industrial tracts and access to fiber-optic lines also play a role in the popularity surge.

Approval of the various projects is expected to quadruple the population to about 25,000 over the next 20 years. And with the majority of the town's residents now driving south to Palm Beach County or east to Stuart and Palm City for their shopping needs, county officials hope retail and commercial development follows.

But the image of those future services still remains little more than notes on a napkin.

"At this point, the chamber is not actively recruiting any kind of business or development to come to Indiantown," said Allon Fish, president and CEO of the Indiantown/Western Martin County Chamber of Commerce. "Along with residential development that will take place, a certain amount of commercial and retail business will follow that automatically. At this point, development is far enough off that it's not something we need to worry about yet. The time will come when all of those things will be under discussion."

Area developers such as Centex Homes agree with that assessment. Centex has several proposed projects that would add more than 3,300 homes along with some commercial space. But company executives say they won't focus on retail until the roof-tops are up.

"What's going to drive the commercial is new homes coming on-line," said Kathleen Breland, vice president of Centex Home's Treasure Coast division. "There has to be that demand before

anybody is going to be willing to set up a business. So we really want to wait and see what the need is and the demand is."

In terms of what to offer future commercial providers, Powers said the community is already prepared. The neighborhood committee's redevelopment plan essentially serves as a guideline for downtown development and includes more flexible regulations to help lure business. It also restricts big-box development to the edge of town, rather than a central spot.

"We've got all the pieces in place on the supply side, and I think the demand will follow the housing," said Powers. "We're building a market that will probably cater to several retail-type things, but that market's not here today."

One retail analyst said Indiantown should start promoting itself immediately to capture better quality tenants — but believes the tranquil town will likely have a successful commercial future either way, given the impending residential boom.

"Once you get to that level of population (25,000), obviously there is some need for a centralized shopping district which includes the basics as well as some luxurious element," said Adam Epstein, president of **Site Analytics Co.** in New York City. "And Indiantown is particularly interesting because it's a blank slate and it gives them a better story to tell. They can start fresh."

Shops, other businesses to follow rooftops

Commercial zones in Indiantown (outlined in red) are expected to mushroom with completion of more than a dozen residential projects. They will add about 6,000 houses to the community in western Martin County. Developers expect to build almost 3 million square feet of industrial and other commercial space.

Among planned developments

1. Gibb Parcel: 630 houses and 30,000 square feet of commercial space.
2. Indiantown Bio Tech: 190 homes, 432,000 square feet of commercial space, plus a 70-room hotel and docks.
3. Indiantown DRI: 1,800 homes and 30,000 square feet of commercial space.
4. Owens Grove: 449 houses and 30,000 square feet of commercial space.
5. Quillen development: 2,250 homes and 320,000 square feet of commercial space.
6. Shipyard parcel: 140 town homes and 69,170 square feet of commercial space.

Residential-only developments

7. Fort Dawson: 108-lot equestrian community.
8. Heritage Park: 49 lots and two-story assisted living facility.
9. Krystal Oaks: 21 homes.
10. Osceola Pines: 167 homes.
11. Sandy Oaks: 97 homes.

Source: Martin County growth management department, staff research

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