

Mixed Use a Hot Trend in Senior Community Development

By Cathy Rosebaugh-Jennings

The seniors I talk to these days are looking for more than just smaller houses with low-maintenance yards and active adult community centers.

They also want the convenience of a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood with commercial and retail establishments that range from dry cleaners to restaurants. Oh, and amenities within the neighborhood, such as recreation centers, walking trails and multi-purpose classrooms, would be nice, too.

Do such places exist in the Triangle? Actually, they do — with more on the way.

Buzzwords are “Mixed Use” and “New Urbanism”

Across the nation, “mixed use” is just as much a buzzword in senior community development circles as in regular, non-senior development. Sometimes you will hear the same idea described as “new urbanism.” People are talking about a return to the small town character of yesteryear, complete with village centers and town squares, an array of housing choices, shops and offices, and streetscapes that favor pedestrians over cars.

The presence of senior housing is integral to many of these new mixed use developments in the Triangle.

The Cedars of Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill’s “neighborhood of the future,” Meadowmont is a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly community with homes, apartments, a town center, an elementary school and a continuing care retirement community — The Cedars of Chapel Hill. With a pedestrian tunnel that runs under Highway 54, and walking and cycling paths on both sides of the street, The Cedars is within walking distance to Meadowmont Village center. The developer describes Meadowmont as the “small-town Main Street atmosphere you thought existed only with old television sitcoms.”

The Cardinal at North Hills

Another continuing care retirement community with a mixed use feel is The Cardinal at North Hills, under development by Kane Realty partnering with Drucker & Falk. The North Hills CCRC will feature complete medical care and easy access to a full spectrum of amenities that includes entertainment, dining, stores, and retail shops — all within the pedestrian-friendly, multi-generational community of North Hills.

SearStone

SearStone in Cary at the crossroads of Davis Drive and High House Road is another mixed use development retirement village on the way. Architect Bill Sears is partnering with Retirement Living Services, a company from Hartford, Conn., to develop this continuing care retirement community. The SearStone retirement community residents will not own their homes but will make an upfront entry fee combined with monthly fees in a rent-purchase hybrid.

While The Cedars of Chapel Hill, The Cardinal at North Hills, and SearStone are full CCRCs targeted to an affluent market, other mixed-use senior community developments in planning stages throughout the Triangle are targeting seniors of more modest means and are active adult or age-targeted communities rather than full CCRCs.

SummerWind Plantation

A gated, active adult neighborhood called SummerWind Plantation is in the development stages just off I-40 East at Exit 312 in Clayton. The community calls for a lushly landscaped entrance with a tree-lined boulevard meandering past a four-acre stocked fishing pond, but with shopping and dining literally across the street. SummerWind's planned 13-acre medical office park and proposed assisted/independent living center make this mixed use development attractive to seniors.

The Summerwind Activities Center will be over 7,000 square feet. Overlooking the fishing pond, the first-rate wellness center, complete with indoor pool, sauna and steam, and cardio fitness equipment, will cover four acres. Residents at SummerWind Plantation will have their choice of optional in-home services that include housekeeping, cooking, health care, and pharmacy and grocery deliveries.

Today's sophisticated baby boomer has a wide range of choices in the Triangle, choices that provide the preferred amenities only found in true "mixed use" developments. From continuing care retirement communities to active adult or age-targeted communities, seniors can select the home and setting that will offer them comfort, care and social/cultural activities in equal doses for their retirement years.

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