

## **Housing could double Developers plan 28,000 houses in Denton over next two decades**

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If four proposed large-scale developments come to fruition, the city of Denton could see more than 28,000 new houses in the next 15 to 20 years.

With an estimated 21,185 single-family homes in Denton as of 2005, according to the Denton Central Appraisal District, the proposed developments would more than double the city's size.

Planned along the city's northern and western boundaries, the four developments are in the planning stages with two currently in the city limits.

The Hills of Denton, Rayzor Ranch, Hunter Ranch and Cole Ranch would cover a combined area of more than 9,000 acres with an estimated 40,000 rooftops, including single-family and multi-family housing.

The additional housing will attract retailers as well as industrial, manufacturing and maybe corporate attention, said Karen Dickson, vice president of economic development for the Denton Chamber of Commerce.

"It's kind of a ripple effect," she said. "With more rooftops, you're going to get more retailers. With more housing that you have, more people will be available for new companies."

Already, the city and chamber economic development departments are seeing a difference.

In July, officials received 20 leads from a range of businesses interested in operations in Denton with a year-to-date total of 157. Last year, a total of 11 inquiries for July were recorded for a year-to-date total of 132.

Predominant interest has been in the manufacturing, distribution and biomedical industries.

That interest should balance the influx of homes, Dickson said, adding that the city's ultimate goal would be to maintain a 70-30 split monetarily in property valuation income from business and homes, respectively. Denton currently maintains about a 60-40 split.

The projects also are proposing single-family homes that are above the current average value with some earmarking areas for homes worth \$300,000 or more.

"You're going to see the whole face of north Denton change," Dickson said. "It's all good."

### The Hills of Denton

An area of just more than 2,000 acres north of Loop 288 has caught and held the interest of Tomlin Investments of Addison.

Plans for proposed The Hills of Denton project call for a retail and office mix along the loop frontage property, with the backside of the area developed for an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 single-family homes. Flood plain regions would be developed into walking trails, several lake areas for fishing and swimming, and other outdoor amenities, said Rod Zielke, a partner in Tomlin Investments.

"The profile that we see working in the market is a lot of open space," he said. "Our property in Denton lends itself to that."

The company also plans to build a "high-quality, user-friendly" amenity center, Zielke said, using a similar concept the company used in Lone Star Ranch in Frisco.

"One of the ways you can assure the quality of a project is by providing amenities early in the project," he said.

With a background as a consulting engineer and a familiarity with the region, Zielke said studies have shown that the city is "poised to be one of the next growth areas."

"We're very familiar with Denton and the Denton market, and have a lot of confidence that the market is going to be one of the booming markets," he said.

## Rayzor Ranch

Rayzor Ranch, formerly known as Hillview Center, covers 412 acres bought by Allegiance Development to create a combination of retail, office, medical, hotel and residential development with public parks, museums and an outdoor amphitheater.

Situated just north of the Interstate 35E and 35W convergence and bisected by U.S. Highway 380, the property is scheduled to open the Rayzor Ranch Town Center in the late fall of 2008. The open-air format will feature more than one million square feet of retail space, including a major department store, a 16- to 20-screen movie theater, a large bookstore, restaurants and fashion merchants. Rayzor Ranch North will include 800,000 square feet of retail space anchored by Wal-Mart and Sam's Club, according to Randy Holcombe, executive vice president of retail for the Dallas-based Allegiance Development. Plans also include a full-service hotel and resort with 280 to 300 rooms and a 90,000-square-foot convention center.

The residential portion of Rayzor Ranch includes single-family homes, town homes, condominiums, and senior housing from zero-lot-line villas to assisted and long-term care facilities.

According to preliminary plans unveiled to city officials last year, the residential portion of the development includes more than 350 single-family lots around the perimeter of the property and more than 650 apartment units near the town center.

Allegiance purchased the property earlier this year from the Rayzor family, who has maintained a vacation residence on the hill for more than 50 years.

J. Newton Rayzor bought the hill, long known for the longhorn cattle grazing across the open fields, in 1955, calling the family estate Hillview Ranch.

A former Kmart building, bought by Allegiance as part of the proposed development, was recently vacated by Classic Shows, which was using the 90,000-square-foot building for indoor flea markets. Classic Shows has since relocated the flea markets to Fort Worth.

"I heard that dirt will be moving by the end of the year," Dickson said. "With that, it would be the first visible signs."

## Hunter Ranch

Situated off I-35W, the 3,331-acre development is among the latest to announce intentions for a major development near Denton. Though currently outside the city limits, the project by Arizona-based Aperion Communities abuts the boundaries and is expected to seek annexation, city officials have said.

Plans for the large-scale development are expected to take a different approach, incorporating a number of amenities that are energy efficient and geared to making the development self-sufficient. Officials say plans include everything from onsite energy resources to the latest technology and energy-efficient building materials.

"We're bringing innovation to the master-plan community concept and using all available resources to make it a lifestyle choice," said Gary Lane of Aperion Communities. Lane said the company is planning a presentation before the Denton City Council this month and would unveil more specific plans for the development at that time.

The project calls for approximately 10,035 single-family homes with a maximum of 4,276 multi-family units, according to documents filed with the city's planning and development division.

The area includes the historic Pilot Knob, the highest point in Denton County, known for its alleged ties to Denton lore. The notorious Sam Bass is said to have buried gold there, but it has remained elusive. The hill is within the boundaries of the former Knob Hill Ranch, originally settled by John Paine in the 1800s.

The property is currently owned by Petrus Investments LP, a family investment arm of H. Ross Perot of Dallas, which bought the property in 1987.

## Cole Ranch

The Stratford Co. of Dallas, which owns a 3,406-acre ranch with the Cole family of Denton County, is planning to develop the property off I-35W into a large-scale, mixed-use development. The property, which abuts Denton Municipal Airport, was annexed into the city of Denton in late May.

Cole Ranch will be developed in four phases between 2008 and 2025, eventually including up to 12,000 homes, said Dave Denison, vice president with Stratford Co. The housing will include townhouses, patio homes and other styles of housing, he said. Residential villages would be clustered with retail stores, medical offices, community facilities and schools.

"I don't really see any dirt flying out of there until 2008," he said.

The project will have retail along the I-35W frontage area and an employment center on its northern sector south of the airport.

Large open areas along the flood plain on the property where Hickory Creek passes through will be used for public spaces, Denison said. "It [Cole Ranch] will have a lot of green space, public space, instead of having everything with large yards," he said.

Stratford Co. officials also are talking with Denton school officials about locating campuses within the development.

"Talks have centered around donating an elementary site and making middle school and possibly high school sites available for purchase," he said. The developer also is working with Denton County's road construction consultant, John Polster, on the rights of way for the alignment of the eastern segment of Loop 288, which will cut into Cole Ranch.

The developer also has proposed donating land to the University of North Texas for a golf course.

The company, which has been developing projects primarily in Collin and Denton counties for the past 25 years, said the market is now strong in Denton.

"We see that as one of the best-coming areas as far as large expansion is concerned," Denison said. "Plano is built out, Frisco is building out."

Though activity has picked up in Prosper and Celina, Denison said he believed the market would shift to I-35E and I-35W.

"We just think it's a good place to be," he said.

#### Planning stages

City officials currently are reviewing a new Master Plan Community Zoning District as an amendment to the Denton Development Code in an effort to meet what officials say is a need created by the recent influx of large-scale, mixed-use developments.

"It [the Master Plan Community Zoning District] helps them because it addresses the needs of those unique developments," said Linda Ratliff, Denton's economic development director.

The ordinance allows developers to apply for zoning based on density. With the larger developments, a number of different zonings are required ranging from residential single-family and multi-family units to retail, office and, in some cases, manufacturing, medical and other industries.

"The master plan community ordinance concept is an excellent one," Zielke said. "The intent is to create a zoning category to attract large master-planned communities to Denton. We think it seems to be going along fairly well and hope they will achieve their scheduling goals so that we can begin our project."

The new zoning district concept is now under discussion at the Planning and Zoning Commission level. Officials hope to have the plan before City Council by Sept. 26 or Oct. 13, said Kelly Carpenter, director of the planning and development division.

"Its intent is to allow the developer to propose and the city to review, modify and agree to a set of flexible set of zoning and design to meet both our needs," she said, adding that the idea is not to force the developers to use the standard zoning.

"From a city notion, it's a good balance," Carpenter said. "The city gets good land use and the developer gets flexibility."

A bright future

"This is a good time to be in economic development," Dickson said. "All around the metroplex, these are good times in economic development."

After Sept. 11, 2001, projects were put on hold, she said.

"Now things are getting better for folks," Dickson said.

The city has several major business projects in the works, including Fastenal's regional distribution center, Select Medical's long-term rehabilitation center and Granite Pointe, a business park slated to open its first phases in the next two months.

The city also has a number of smaller housing developments under construction, as well as Unicorn Lake on the city's southern boundary, which also will include upscale housing, a town center concept and amenities including a lake and walking trails. The development already has a movie theater, bank branch, office complex and a new senior living facility. Several restaurants also are slated for the project.

"We're not having to do a lot of recruitment," Dickson said. "The word is out. There's a lot of interest in Denton."

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