

## Proposed development unique to Middle Tennessee

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

### TRANSIT-ORIENTED HOUSING, RETAIL

The City of Lebanon Planning office called a development proposal presented Tuesday morning "unique." But the mixed use development detailed before members of the Lebanon Planning Commission Tuesday may be more than just unique.

To be built adjacent to the Music City Star commuter rail line, the proposed development, according to its owners and architects, is the first in Middle Tennessee that will be planned, designed and constructed to emphasize use of transportation modes other than cars.

The proposed Hamilton Springs Specific Plan is transit-oriented say its developers, noting it will integrate a new Music City Star commuter train station as a central feature of the planned community and also incorporate walking-distance access to offices and retailers from residences.

The Hamilton Springs Specific Plan is a project of custom home builder Jack Bell and his brother, Rick Bell. In 2006, the Bells began the first phase of Hamilton Springs, an upscale Planned Unit Development in west Lebanon on property fronted along Highway 70 and extending back to Old Horn Springs Road.

Jack Bell said the recent downturn in the economy had caused him and his brother to rethink the original steps taken to develop Hamilton Springs. He said they realized there needed to be a change in their original plan for Hamilton Springs, and they responded by stepping back and taking a big-picture look to see what change or changes should be made.

He said they turned to Lose & Associates, Inc., a Nashville-based design firm, to determine how to refocus plans for future phases of Hamilton Springs to take into account new market conditions and changing community and homebuyer priorities. Lose & Associates concluded that the geographic location of the undeveloped portion of Hamilton Springs offered a unique opportunity to provide a lifestyle choice favored by a growing segment of the Middle Tennessee population. The result is the proposed Hamilton Springs Specific Plan.

"In late 2009, it became obvious that the typical suburban lifestyle and home style were undergoing an historic change. The market has changed as a result of our country's economic troubles and I believe those of us in the custom home business must change with it," Bell said. "Lose & Associates has developed a plan that we believe will not only allow us to develop our property successfully, but will also provide a lifestyle choice that Lebanon residents currently don't have."

The latest 2010 Home Design Trends Survey report from the American Institute of Architects found that during the past several years there has been increasing demand for sustainable housing options within close proximity to mass transit, employment centers, retail and entertainment options, and access to open space for recreation. At the same time, median single family home size decreased, driven by factors such as the number of first time home buyers, tightening credit standards and a desire to keep energy costs down. In addition, more and more homebuyers began to look for homes in compact, walkable communities that support healthier, active, more convenient lifestyles.

"By taking a fresh 'outside the box' look at this site, we quickly realized that because it has frontage on Hwy. 70 and the Music City Star rail line and because there is adequate distance along the rail to provide a new stop, the site is perfect for a transit-oriented development," explained Mike Wrye, vice president of Lose & Associate and a resident of Lebanon.

"The Regional Transportation Authority is a proud and enthusiastic supporter of transit-oriented development," said Paul J. Ballard, CEO of the Regional Transportation Authority. "We are pleased to see a developer recognize the value of public transit and create an opportunity for local residents to live, work, and shop within walking distance of the Music City Star. This is a huge win for RTA and the Wilson County community."

Other Middle Tennessee transportation and planning officials also commended the transit-oriented development proposal. They particularly mentioned how the proposed development will encourage community and economic development efforts and enhance the transportation infrastructure in a sustainable way.

Ed Cole, executive director of the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee, added, "We see this as an incredible milestone for transit-oriented development in the region, the first true transit-oriented development proposal and, when constructed, the first to be built. It will show in a very tangible way the benefits of doing mixed-use development designed around a transit station, in this case a new station for the Music City Star."

"The Hamilton Springs proposal is a great example of community and economic development around mass transit," noted Michael Skipper, director of the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, which is responsible for planning and prioritizing projects for federal funds. "Hamilton Springs has the opportunity to be a trendsetter for the region in delivering a more sustainable way of living for a growing number of Middle Tennesseans – without asking them to sacrifice affordability, convenience, or prosperity."

Skipper added, "The region's new 2035 Regional Transportation Plan rewards communities that find ways to attract mixed-use developments with a range of housing and job opportunities by providing funding for much needed infrastructure improvements to accommodate the growth that is coming our way."

Bell pointed out that the proposed Hamilton Springs Specific Plan addresses all of these factors in an innovative design that creates a traditional neighborhood centered by a train station.

He said, "We think this 'village' concept will appeal to not only residents of Hamilton Springs, but also to businesses, retailers and visitors to Lebanon."

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