



Coastal Real Estate News

Residential Construction Leads to Commercial Boom in West Chatham

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Following the last ten years of dramatic residential growth in West Chatham, commercial development is now keeping pace. Commercial construction is in full swing in the Greater Pooler area, continuing the economic boom that community has been experiencing over the past 18 months with growth occurring in both residential and commercial development.

So far in 2006, Pooler City Council members have approved more than 169 single family residential and 56 attached single family units, and more than 30 commercial construction permits have been issued.

Pooler City Manager Dennis Baxter said the growth in commercial construction could be attributed to the massive residential growth appearing throughout the area. "The original boom began about 12 or 14 years ago with residential growth," Baxter said. "When the Parkway got into place, we started experiencing more commercial and then the big boom with residential growth began." According to Mayor Mike Lamb and Baxter, the key to success is the planning and timing of the developments. Baxter said more than 90 percent of the plans brought before council are PUDs, or planned urban developments, laying out in the early stages locations of both residential and commercial development. "We use PUD developments so when you do your plans, you see where everything is going to be and it all falls into place," Baxter said.

Pooler Parkway has become a hotbed of the new construction focus, with planned development signs dotting the landscape. A new Longhorn Steak House, expected to open in mid-summer, has emerged at the corner of Pooler Parkway and Maxwell Drive. It is situated on two lots and will encompass ample parking and seating capacity for 188, Baxter said. According to site improvement plans, the restaurant will have accesses from Trader's Way and Towne Commerce Drive.

Sam's Club, going up across the Parkway from Home Depot and Wal-Mart, is also advancing rapidly through the construction process. Concrete out walls and metal framework is complete. "Those companies will come in and hire a few locals and bring in something like a tinker toy set, and the buildings appear in a short amount of time," Baxter said. "They seem to use the same floor plan city after city. We saw that happen with Cracker Barrel, Hardees and McDonalds."

Other recent construction in the area includes Mulberry At Godley Station, a new 50,000 square feet office space, situated within a 115-acre Office/ Commercial Park which to date has 60% occupancy.

The announced new Ikea and Target distribution facilities, as well as the major expansion of Gulfstream will bring new residents and employees to shop and dine, as well. "Overall, I think we are getting a good mix here," Baxter said. "We would love to see some of the rumors of grocers like Kroger and Publix come to life, but at this point, they all remain rumors. And, they are coming, it's just a matter of time."

AMB Business Center

Lamb said Pooler is also working to generate lasting economic bonds with its neighbor Bloomingdale through collaborative efforts like the AMB Morgan Business Center. The estimated \$111 million project will include four buildings encompassing a total of more than 2.8 million square feet. However, the two cities were in a quandary over how to initially handle the situation. "It was a bad decision to split it," Lamb said. "I am very proud of my council in that they understood too many stumbling blocks would make the project go away." Lamb said Bloomingdale and Pooler agreed that Pooler would provide water and sewer services and that Bloomingdale would consider the company within their city limits. The new facilities, after construction, will house more than 30 different companies and create more than 2,800 direct jobs and an additional 1,900 indirect positions. AMB figures project the increase in direct annual payroll will surpass the \$100 million mark with regional payroll increases to top \$158 million. The company has forecast the increase in income would generate \$50 million in retail sales and more than \$2 million in ongoing sales tax revenue. Also included in the summary was an estimated \$1.5 million in annual property tax revenue for the county.

On the construction front, AMB predicts that construction projects from 2007 through 2011 on site will generate an average of more than 300 construction jobs each year, paying out more than \$52 million in salaries over the time period.