

BURNING QUESTIONS

On the waterfront



Submitted illustration

RIVERHEATH IS PLANNED to be a mix of residences, shops and a restaurant.

Developer sees many uses for RiverHeath

The Post-Crescent

Mark Geall, a former Fox Cities resident and a principal in Tanesay Development of Denver, wants to turn a 15-acre site on the Fox River in Appleton into RiverHeath, a mix of residences and businesses.

Tanesay has an accepted offer to buy the site — just east of the College Avenue bridge — from the current owner Kaukauna Utilities. Right now, it's a brownfield. But Geall wants to transform it into an inviting destination for residents, while preserving public access to the riverfront.

Unusual in his approach was a series of meetings he held to get input from the public about what RiverHeath should — and shouldn't — become.

With the first phase of the plans set, we asked Geall a few questions about the development and what he'd like to accomplish:

What are the current plans for the project? Are they the final plans?

RiverHeath will be a mixed-use neighborhood with shops, residences and a restaurant located on the Fox River just below the College Avenue bridge.

We're planning 60 residences, a restaurant and a small amount of retail space in the first phase. We'd like to have a few food providers (a baker, deli, dairy, etc.), so residents can walk downstairs to shop for groceries with-



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THE RIVERHEATH DEVELOPMENT is on the Fox River, just east of the College Avenue bridge, in Appleton.

On the Web

www.RiverHeath.com

out having to drive to the highway for milk and a loaf of bread. The retailers we have spoken with are interested in joining the project, so the plans for the first phase are looking good.

We have wonderful designs for the rest of the neighborhood, but we have to wait to see what parts of the project people enjoy the most. Perhaps there will be demand for another restaurant or more residences. Once you create a space, the community will take it in directions you may never

have imagined when you started out.

We're working with Professor Jodi Sedlock at Lawrence University as part of her course in environmental studies. One of my favorite phrases that I've learned in talking with her and her students is "adaptive management." I'll probably mangle this description, but generally adaptive management means learning by doing: collecting all the data you can and changing your design as more information becomes available.

We have a beautiful piece of waterfront land, a compelling design and an energetic group of people who want to live there. We'll have to have another

conversation in a year or so to see where we're going next.

What did you learn from the public meetings you held and how did it change your plans?

We have been very fortunate, and RiverHeath has captured the community's attention. From the first public meeting in June, it became clear to us that people cared about this project. We've had a good response not only from the meetings, but also from the Web site, www.RiverHeath.com, where people can send us inquiries directly.

We've learned several

RIVERHEATH: Developer sees mixed uses

From C-1

things. At the beginning, we thought we would have an enthusiastic response from boaters who would want to buy private slips. We learned that the Appleton Yacht Club has great overnight facilities for boats and that we needed tie-ups for boaters moving through Lock No. 4 and for those who want to stop for lunch, but probably not a private marina.

We also learned that people were interested in community gardens. It's one thing to tell people they can leave the maintenance and upkeep of a large single-family house behind for a room with a view down the Fox, but many people don't want to leave gardening behind as well. As a result, we've set aside a space for a community garden, so every resident can have a plot to work.

Through the Web site, we're learning new things from community members all the time.

Is there really a market for more condos here?

We don't think there are any waterfront places to live like the ones at RiverHeath. We're right downtown in the thick of things, and some of the other developments are farther out and more similar to single-family housing.

I think there's a demand for people who want to live on the water within walking distance of downtown. I have a friend who works for Kimberly Clark, and, when she moved to town a few years ago, she couldn't find a condominium she liked, so she found a place outside the Fox Valley and commutes to work. If RiverHeath was around when she was looking, I'm sure she would have found a home there.

I think we have sizable pent-up demand for this kind of

housing, from both young professionals and empty nesters who don't need a large house after their children move into their own places.

We've had a good response from our early adopters and have an interest list with more than 100 names for 60 residences. The list is made up of a diverse group of people who are interested in everything from one bedrooms on up to one person who asked us if we would combine two units to make a 3,500-square-foot apartment on the top floor.

Having a big interest list is sort of like going undefeated in the preseason; it's nice, but what counts is what happens when we open the sales office. We're opening our sales office in early 2008 at Trolley Square, right across the hall from Pullmans. People can stop by on their way to lunch or dinner and see the floor plans, the granite for countertops, the model, and maybe even put down a deposit on their new home.

What does it mean that this project is a pilot for green design by the U.S. Green Building Council?

Our architect, Mark Ernst of Engberg Anderson, has worked with the U.S. Green Building Council for years, and it was his idea to propose RiverHeath for the pilot program.

Although the USGBC has been certifying individual buildings since 1993, this is the first time it's looking at entire neighborhoods — for example, where they're located and their connection to parks, public transportation, trails and other downtown amenities.

The idea is you can build the greenest, most energy-efficient building in the world, but if people have to drive 30 miles to get there, you're not saving all that much energy or other re-

sources.

The pilot will reward RiverHeath, because the neighborhood is downtown, on an old industrial site (rather than a rural cornfield), adjacent to Telulah Park and the riverfront trail system, and walking distance to shops and the rest that downtown has to offer.

Although the buildings will have many traditional green elements, like energy-efficient windows and use of natural light, this pilot program recognizes RiverHeath's downtown location and close connection to the community as much as anything else.

What's the timetable from here? Has the city approved the plans?

We've been working with Pete Hensler and Monica Klaeser from the city development office for more than a year, and more recently with Mayor Hanna, and the rest of the city directors, like Public Works Director Paula Vandehy, Parks and Recreation Director Bill Lecker, Fore Chief Neil Cameron, and even Mike Michlig, the city forester, for tree species selection.

As we've worked together over the months, we've developed a plan that embraces public access to the riverfront and will extend the trail coming from Teluleh Park along the water. We will likely submit a more formal design package in the first part of 2008, but the city already knows what's on the way.

We'd like to start construction in early summer 2008, about the same time as the College Avenue bridge reconstruction. That way, we can have all the hammers swinging at the same time. We hope to have people moving into the new neighborhood in the summer of 2009.