

THE PLOT PURSUIT

By Dana Baumgart



Fox Cities homeowners find alternative housing needs in subdivisions

Most first-time homeowners purchase their first home on a tight budget with dreams of updating the interior and improving curb appeal. After a few years of living under construction, they begin the search for a second home which often brings them in a newly developed subdivision, complete with rolling hills, matching lampposts and landscaped community areas.

While certainly pleasing to the eye, potential home purchasers should be aware of the advantages and drawbacks when deciding if the grass is truly greener in a subdivided community.

ENERGY-EFFICIENT HOME IN A KID-FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD

Real estate listings usually highlight the reasons why homeowners like the option of moving into a subdivision and there is plenty to choose from in the Fox Cities from the town of Neenah to the city of Kaukauna.

According to Tom Rooney, director of sales and marketing for Mark Winter Homes in Appleton, Fox Cities homeowners are moving to subdivisions because of the benefits that new housing offers, including plans, features and energy efficiency.

"Subdivisions provide an efficient and cost-effective plot of land," says Rooney. "Most provide city water and sewer and general municipal services that people want today."

Homeowners are also looking for a sense

of community. For example, Mahler Farms in Neenah consists of predominately young corporate families who were drawn to the area because of the school district and proximity to town and work. Most individuals are active, social and congregate in the neighborhood park located in the middle of the subdivision.

"Subdivisions are reflecting the changing face of the Fox Cities where you find families, couples and singles of various ethnic and cultural groups," Rooney says. "The only specific demographic would be socioeconomic since most subdivisions have restrictive covenants that will determine the price point at which the homes within it will be built."

Homes in the Mahler Farms subdivision range from \$250,000 to \$450,000.

SUBDIVIDING LAND

Most of the time, subdivisions are created when a landowner decides to sell a parcel of land. The owner can choose to develop the land or it can be sold to a developer for a lump sum payment.

Either way, plans are drawn, streets are named and covenants are created. Scenery like trees, ponds and hills are put in place and builders are selected. Spec homes are built and real estate agents are called in to place the homes and lots on the market.

Before long, a community is created and the next plot of land is up for sale.

NEW CONSTRUCTION LOCATED MILES FROM TOWN

While subdivisions fit the criteria of many potential home purchasers, things such as covenants, distance and the chance of never-ending construction should be discussed.

Covenants are legal obligations that homeowners agree to abide by and are fairly common in most subdivisions across the Fox Valley. These rules may govern the exterior of the home, specify the minimum square footage, and dictate where cars can be parked or if outdoor gardens and laundry poles are allowed.

Most real estate professionals agree that covenants exist to protect the value of the property.

"Covenants make sure certain things that homeowners dislike about living in the city don't follow them to their next home," says Greg Drusch, marketing manager of Cypress Homes in Appleton.

In addition to rules, another thing to consider is distance. Most subdivisions in the Fox Valley do not allow lots to be sold for



CONDO COMMUNITIES

If a subdivision located outside of town doesn't satisfy a potential homebuyer's criteria, there are several condominium communities that offer individuals and families who wish to stay in the city an alternative.

Those searching for an up-and-coming development should consider the RiverHeath Townhouse Community. Starting at \$375,000, seven townhomes are currently being developed for purchase on the southern triangle of the property with river access on both sides.

"The Fox River is a prime location for community development," says Kris Oates, community director for RiverHeath. "The market is looking for something contemporary with a view."

For commercial property, RiverHeath will offer 2,000 feet of river walkway, restaurant, office space, a yoga studio, coffee shop, theater, pub, outdoor skating space and kayak rental.

"We want to encourage local businesses to seek out space in RiverHeath since our vision is for the area to be open for everyone in Appleton and surrounding communities to enjoy," Oates says.

For serious city-slickers, the Lawrence Court condos offer potential home purchasers a community with proximity to downtown Appleton. Its location is advantageous for individuals who enjoy supporting local farmers, restaurants, musicians and artists throughout the year. Families enjoy proximity to the Building for Kids and YMCA.

Just like a subdivision, this community has bylaws and is governed by an association. However, exterior maintenance such as lawn care and snow removal is provided to residents of the community.

Located minutes from highway 41, The Villas at Apple Creek also offer potential home purchasers in the Fox Valley community living without the worry of yard work. The condominium-style homes are designed to look and feel like a European village.

Offering something different than the traditional subdivision, homeowners enjoy amenities like a heated outdoor pool, fitness center and clubhouse.

The Villas also feature a wildlife pond and creek as well as the mature wooded area.



commercial use, so filling up a gas tank or running to the store for one ingredient to finish dinner may not be a quick trip.

"Some subdivisions are located miles from grocery stores, gas stations, highway access and other modern conveniences," Drusch says.

While streets are often paved, new home construction continues for several months, even years, in most subdivided communities. When one home is complete, another is just being started, which means the dust from construction may take a while to settle.

Continued.



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MOVE-IN CONDITION WITH FINANCING AVAILABLE

Developers, builders and real estate agents help narrow down the list of choices based on the homeowner's list of criteria.

"A specific subdivision is not usually the start of the home buying process," says Joyce Bytof, chairman and CEO of Coldwell Banker The Real Estate Group in Appleton. "A potential purchaser gives an agent their criteria and is then shown several homes or lots in several different subdivisions."


Bytof believes that while location is still very important, for families with children, schools and related sports activities are also high on the list. "Of course, staying in their price range is crucial," says Bytof.

Coldwell Banker's website includes an advanced search option where users can learn more about a specific subdivision by watching a video taken at the site or reading about a specific subdivisions covenants.

"Covenants generally should not be a deal breaker when looking at subdivisions," she says.


In response to the real estate market, subdivision development and new home construction have slowed in the Fox Valley over the last few years. But most real estate professionals and homebuilders feel that as long as there is land to be developed and owners willing to sell, subdivisions will continue to thrive as homeowners look to move out of the city in search of new home possibilities.

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