

# MidTowne: A Newer Version of Old-Style Living

by: Alberto Mares, AICP

Paris has the Eiffel Tower. New York has tall skyscrapers. Boston has Fenway Park. Las Vegas has "The Strip." Washington, DC has a rich history and many famous monuments. All these cities are known for their iconic landmarks, but what do they have in common with Midlothian? Soon Midlothian will have its own iconic landmark in the form of a new development that will be the envy of many and will pay homage to yesteryear when times were different and everything was simpler.

MidTowne is a new mixed-use, sustainable community springing up along George Hopper Road between Frank Seale Middle School and Midlothian High School designed to "evoke feelings of comfort, relaxation, friendship, familiarity, and security." MidTowne will be an alley-based community with a neo-traditional design and layout that promotes interaction and socializing among neighbors with its large inviting front porches opening directly onto public spaces. This development will conjure up images of the Original Town during its heyday.

At completion, MidTowne will have a variety of single-family residential homes, office and retail spaces, living units over retail, 15 acres of open and green space and tree-lined streets including a boulevard that aligns with the high school rotunda, an assisted living facility, a day care facility, brownstones/townhomes and an eight-acre school site. All nestled within 131 acres in the geographic center of Midlothian. Other elements within this development include rear-entry garages, shorter block lengths, a central greenbelt, underground electric lines, and a variety of pedestrian-scaled features.

All residential homes will be energy-efficient using Energy Star-rated designs. These houses will portray the appearance of a pier-and-beam foundation with architectural themes, styles, and details designed to reflect the historic homes in Midlothian's

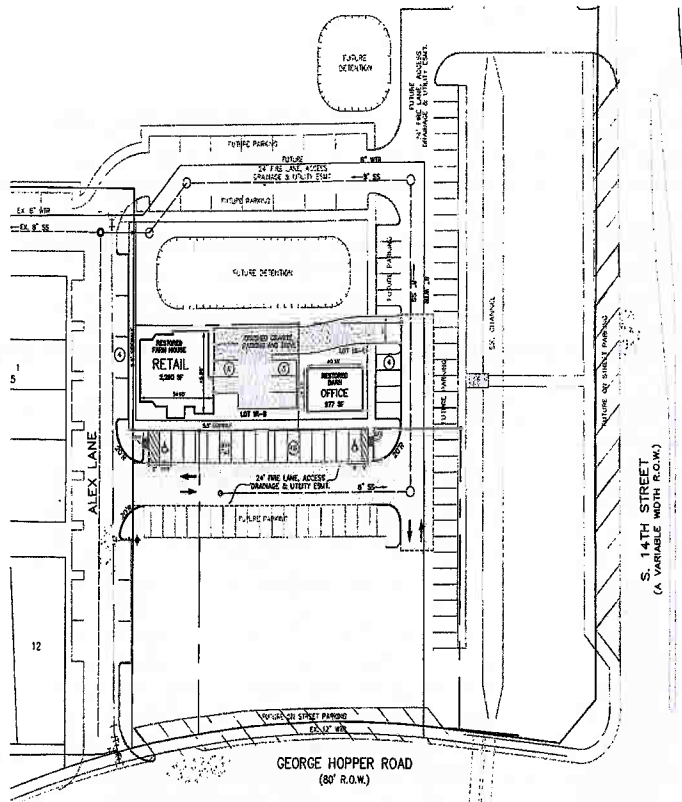
Original Town. Cementitious fiberboard material (i.e. Hardi-siding) will add flexibility in the overall design while providing long-term quality construction similar to the use of masonry. To uphold these high development standards approved by City Council, residential architecture may require the approval of the MidTowne Architectural Review Board. The brownstone/townhome products will be required to meet a minimum 90% brick development standard.

All non-residential buildings, including the elementary school, are designed to be environmentally-friendly and meet the rigorous standards for LEED qualification status (LEED is the commercial equivalent of Energy Star), as set forth by the U.S. Green Building Council. Prior to construction, site plans and building architecture must be approved by the Planning & Zoning Commission to ensure a high quality development. Such standards include 360° pedestrian-scale architecture (no blank wall design), and historic pedestrian-style lighting. On-street parking will be allowed along George Hopper Road and 14th Street. These uses are designed to tie-in with the residential areas via landscaped sidewalks and other planned pedestrian-friendly streets. In addition, all landscaping within this development will be drought-tolerant plants to reduce water consumption.

Another unique feature about this development is that that it will be the City's first Public Improvement District (PID). A public improvement district is a special assessment district created to maintain certain public amenities

and improvements specifically within an established boundary. Property owners in that district agree to pay into the district in return for services they agree to fund. The assessments for PIDs appear in annual tax statements sent to property owners through the Appraisal District. PIDs can increase property values by enhancing a neighborhood beyond what city services can usually





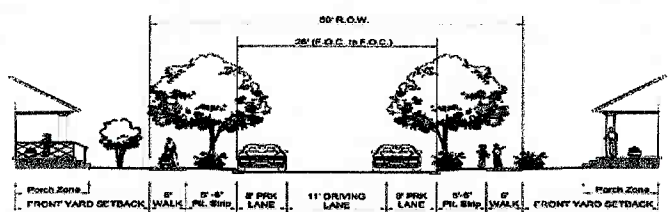
offer. At completion, this PID will maintain 15 acres of open and green spaces, street parkways, ponds, water features, landscaping, outdoor furniture, lighting, irrigation, and many other pedestrian amenities and enhancements. The 2008-2009 assessment rates, as approved by City Council for MidTowne, will be 12¢ per \$100 of appraised value for residential lots of record and 7¢ per \$100 of appraised value for commercial lots of record.

In addition to looking to the past to revive neo-traditional elements and integrating those into the fabric of this community, the developers of this community have also preserved two historic structures originally located on site. The preservation of the two historic structures (Countryman House and Barn) which date back to the early 1900s, were a top priority with the developer. Plans from the beginning included reuse, renovation to historic standards and integration into the MidTowne community as new office and retail spaces.

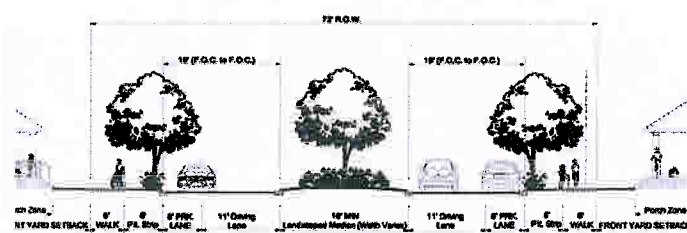
The brainchild and developer of this community, Monte Anderson, a 1976 graduate of Midlothian High School and the founding President for the North Central Texas Chapter of the Congress of New Urbanism, is quickly becoming one of North Texas' premier new urbanist developers. His most recent projects include the renovation of the historic Belmont Hotel in Oak Cliff and the Duncanville Town Center projects. The ability to purchase 131 acres within walking distance of the town's commercial core is what led Anderson to Midlothian, where he could put his New Urbanism beliefs to work. He paid careful attention to the City's newly-adopted Comprehensive Plan (EnVision Midlothian 2025) to guide his concept and design decisions for this project. It is a plan free from cul-de-sacs and gated entryways; a

common staple found in many new suburban communities. Mr. Anderson stated, "What we're doing is basically expanding the Downtown. The suburbs need New Urbanism too because they deteriorate like the cities." City leaders and staff embraced the (New Urbanism) concept from the first time he presented it. This project offers the best of both worlds by keeping the small-town character and offering a wide range of options from country estates to bungalows and garden homes.

With that type of vision and leadership, it is no wonder that MidTowne has all the elements in place to be that "magazine cover" or "award-winning" development that inspires future research and case studies on how to successfully implement the surrounding environment and blend the principles of New Ur-



S-50-26 Two-way Street with Parking



A-72-38 Two-way Avenue with Parking

banism. In fact, people are already talking about MidTowne outside of Midlothian. Last October it was awarded the prestigious and coveted Current Planning Award from the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA).

As the MidTowne community begins to take shape, the citizens of Midlothian can rest assured that the City is now starting to get the recognition it deserves for the implementation of many progressive planning principles that are usually reserved for larger cities. Citizens can also expect city staff to implement many of the successful aspects of MidTowne in future developments to ensure that those communities have a positive and everlasting impact on the City.

Further information on MidTowne can be found on their website at <http://midtowneliving.com>