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### **NEW URBANISM MOVES TO MATTHEWS PARK SQUARE BRINGS TOWNHOMES, BUSINESS CONDOS DOWNTOWN**

*Author: DOUG SMITH, Staff Writer*

Matthews Alive! festival-goers won't find Park Square on the list of attractions at the Labor Day weekend celebration.

But they probably will notice the southeast Mecklenburg town's first foray into new urbanism at 316 E. John St., across from the post office.

The pounding of construction hammers and rumble of street-paving equipment echoed across the 4-acre site when I visited Friday morning.

Motorists slowed and traffic backed up in the post office parking lot as roadside flagmen ran interference for asphalt rollers.

With all that going on, I didn't dare step foot onto the construction site.

But from the bushes in an overgrown yard across John Street, I got a nice view of how all the pieces are coming together in Park Square, which combines commercial and residential buildings with what will be a landscaped park area.

New urbanism, also called neotraditional development, is a popular trend nationwide. It mixes shops and services with housing, encourages walking instead of driving and tries to re-create the small-town ambience people remember from bygone days.

Developers often start from scratch, including a complete array of retail, restaurant, residential and professional services in mixed-use projects like Birkdale Village in Huntersville and Phillips Place in SouthPark.

But in Matthews, which has more than 22,000 residents, many shops, restaurants and other amenities already are operating within easy walking distance of the Park Square site.

That proximity to other commercial and retail uses was key to The Downtown Group's decision to develop 36 townhomes and 24 business/residential condos downtown.

It also was important to Matthews leaders, who worked closely with the developers on design to ensure that the project meshes with the town's vision.

The most visible building from John Street is a two-story brick structure designed to blend architecturally with downtown storefronts.

Based on sales so far, home buyers and business owners like what they see.

Tim Crawford of Citiline, a partner in The Downtown Group with real estate developer Curtis Kennington, said buyers have contracts on 22 townhomes, seven of 12 residential condos and 11 of 12 commercial condos.

"I think it's working," Crawford said. "A lot of people have come behind us doing similar things in Matthews."

The commercial mix at Park Square will include an art gallery, an insurance office, a marketing firm, a home builder, a commercial real estate office, a speech therapist and a chiropractor.

"It's a nice cross section of downtown merchants and service providers, exactly what we had hoped to attract," Crawford said.

Also, he said, a couple of investors bought commercial condos to rent to other businesses. Citiline is coordinating leasing of those for the investors.

Second-floor residential condos have recessed balconies, and first-floor business condos have recessed entrances.

All condos are about 1,018 square feet, and two-story townhomes total 1,152 square feet. Residential prices start around \$126,000. Crawford expects the final commercial condo to sell in the \$170,000s.

Crawford said townhome buyers who are under contract should be able to move in by the end of the year. Other buyers probably could be in by early next year, he said.

He said this year's unusually wet weather delayed construction of the condo building, to be completed by early next spring.

The condo building is "the truest form of new urbanism because it mixes uses in one downtown building," Crawford said.

The initial condo and townhome buyers include young singles, newly marrieds, empty nesters and single women, he said.

"If you want to see diversity," he said, "go to a townhome project because it's all over the map." Reinhardt Architecture Inc. designed the buildings and worked with Mayflower Design Studio on the landscape planning. Maleady Builders Inc. is the contractor. Allen Tate Realtors' Matthews office is handling sales.

Crawford said Citiline is sold on new urbanism. It's negotiating with another small town outside the Charlotte region to build a similar project on public-owned land while seeking other opportunities in the Carolinas.

If those paving machines take a day off, you should be able check the progress at Park Square ([www.parksquareinfo.com](http://www.parksquareinfo.com)) from the street during the Matthews downtown festival.

Doug Smith: (704) 358-5174; [dougsmith@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:dougsmith@charlotteobserver.com)

Caption:

1. DOUG SMITH - STAFF PHOTO. This brick townhome building is nearing completion at Park Square, a mixed-use project under construction in downtown Matthews.

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