

Major housing project lands near Dublin

BRIAN R. BALL | BUSINESS FIRST

Highland Management Group Inc. plans to unveil a 1,250-acre housing and commercial community northwest of Dublin.

The Columbus company and lead developer of the proposed Jerome Village will hold several community meetings to pitch the construction of 1,500 single-family homes and 700 condos and townhouses to a rural community known for its anti-development fervor.

Highland CEO Scott T. Mallory expects it to take 15 to 20 years to build out the development north of Glacier Ridge Metro Park.

Plans call for establishing clusters of housing projects at a variety of prices and mixing them with commercial projects, including a village center.

"What we're trying to do here is create a true community," Mallory said. "It's not a neighborhood."



Rather than build around a golf course, which has been a popular approach in big Central Ohio housing projects, Bird Houk Collaborative designers have proposed developing Jerome Village around 315 acres of parkland connected by bike and walking paths. The path would connect into pathways at the Glacier Ridge Metro Park.

Most of the houses would be within a 10-minute walk of the village center.

"It allows people to interact with the park and not be stuck (driving) in their car," Mallory said.

Out into the open

Farmland between Dublin and Marysville has long held an attraction for developers for its proximity to Dublin offices, Honda of America auto plants and Route 33. But Jerome Township residents have blocked most major development proposals at the ballot box after those few projects have been approved by township planners and township trustees.

Highland will host the first of three open houses for township residents April 11 at Jerome Methodist Church in a bid to build support for

the project. It hopes to file formal plans in May or June.

Mallory pledged the developer will attempt to incorporate ideas from the residents into the final proposal.

"I think it shows an openness on the part of the developers ... to get community feedback," said Bob Merkle, chairman of the township's board of trustees. "I think (the conceptual plan) looks good on my first impression."

Merkle said he thinks a main boulevard into the development from Glacier Ridge Metro Park and the extensive use of parkland may appeal to township residents.

"To me, it's the type of development that would help maintain the rural character of the township," he said. "We don't want to become an exurb of Columbus that's all pavement and yards."

Dublin City School District officials also have an interest

in the project because the developer has set aside sites for middle and elementary schools within Jerome Village. The district expects about 1,470 students to reside in the development.

"That's extremely helpful in our planning," said David Baker, the district's public information coordinator.

The district expects future projects in the township to generate more students.

"It doesn't mean we're done by any means," Baker said. "This isn't the only vacant land out there."

Nationwide Realty steps in

Mallory acknowledged plans for Jerome Village may

meet opposition, but he plans to keep the project in the township and hopes the community sets a high standard for other area developments.

"This could set a great precedent for the rest of the township," he said. "It becomes their comprehensive plan for the future."

Highland has brought in a powerful equity partner and development adviser to help improve the project's chances.

Nationwide Realty Investors Ltd., best known as the developer of Columbus' Arena District, has stepped in to fill a key financial role.

Nationwide Realty President

Brian Ellis said Highland has done well finding property close to Dublin's technology park, which has attracted Ohio State University Medical Center as a major tenant.

Highland "has put together a great assemblage of land in what I think is one of the greatest growth corridors in Central Ohio if not the top growth corridor," Ellis said.

He declined to reveal his company's investment in Jerome Village.

The project marks the first large land play in Central Ohio for the development arm of Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co., though it has a similar 1,000-acre joint venture under way in California.

Mallory said the first phase of development could begin north of the park within 18 months if plans are approved. But the village center off Route 42 could also come into play early because of demand for that type of neighborhood housing.

Mallory has little fear of the area's slowing housing market, noting a strong employment center and dwindling amount of land for housing in Dublin.

"We have an opportunity to start with a clean slate," he said.
