

The Columbus Dispatch

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 05, 2014

On the house: Housing hot spots both in town, suburbs

By Jim Weiker

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The new year provides as good an opportunity as any to reflect on the big picture. With that in mind, here, in no particular order, are the five most important housing development trends at play in central Ohio as we turn the calendar.

1. Rental boom

The rental market in the Columbus area has rarely—never?—been hotter than it is now. What began as a byproduct of the housing recession has morphed into a phenomenon.

An estimated 13,000 apartments are under construction or well into planning in central Ohio.

This isn't strictly a construction boom, however. In the past few years, hundreds of central Ohio homes have gone from owner-occupied to tenant-occupied, catering to residents who either can't buy a home because of the housing crash and tighter lending standards or simply don't want to.

2. Urban renewal

Downtown gets a lot of attention, for good reason. The area is alive with construction activity that is transforming the city center with new apartments, restaurants and retail space.

About 1,400 apartments are in some form of development Downtown, most of them with commercial space on the ground floor.

The activity seen Downtown reflects a broader interest in urban living. From Merion Village to Harrison West, Franklinton to Olde Towne East, urban neighborhoods close to the center city are seeing bustle they haven't enjoyed in years.

In short, city living is cool again.

3. Big village

At the other extreme is Jerome Village, the massive housing and commercial development in the southeastern corner of Union County.

This might be barely a blip on the radar of most central Ohioans, who might view the location as a stopping point on the way to

Toledo, but when it's done, the 1,435-acre Jerome Village will include schools, shops, offices and parks in addition to 2,200 homes.

The final product is years off, but with housing construction well underway and plenty of employers, such as Dublin Methodist Hospital, providing nearby jobs, expect central Ohio to tilt ever more this year to the Great Northwest.

4. Land rush

One reason that Jerome Village and urban building sites are important is because there aren't that many big developed subdivisions elsewhere with many empty lots.

That could change this year as



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builders — and their bankers — start developing big communities that will help central Ohio home construction catch up with the rest of housing's recovery.

The most coveted sites remain along the northern rim of central Ohio, from Hilliard to Gahanna, but they can be found especially in southern Delaware County. If sewer lines along Sawmill Parkway are extended north of Home Road, as proposed, expect to see bulldozers follow along the corridor.

5. Downtown in the 'burbs

Downtown living isn't merely popular in Downtown Columbus.

Throughout central Ohio, suburbs are busy trying to develop their own lively mix of housing, shops, restaurants and offices.

Nowhere is this likely to be bigger than in Dublin, where the ambitious Bridge Street District master plan calls for dense development along W. Dublin-Granville Road from I-270 to Sawmill Road, and along Riverside Drive, creating a truly walkable downtown.

Otherwise, suburbs such as Grove City, Upper Arlington and perhaps Worthington (with the Methodist Children's Home site development up in the air) will continue trying to liven their center cities. ■