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Charrette gives rare chance to shape town's development

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For the first time in Franklin's history, everyone who wants to can have a say in a new neighborhood development plan.

Tim Ryan, owner and developer of The Sanctuary Communities, is holding a charrette process July 10-13 to discuss the development of The Sanctuary Village.

The charrette, an intense design discussion, will stretch for 18 hours a day.

"It's a decision-making process on steroids," said Ben Brown, a Franklin-based freelance writer and media consultant. "We cram a process that may take months or longer into a few days."

Neighbors and citizens are invited to meet with designers and engineers to form a master plan that will satisfy everyone.

"Everyone gets to ask questions and present their point of view," said Brown. He said there are no secrets, and together everyone talks about worries, concerns and possibilities.

This discussion centers around Ryan's Sanctuary Village development. It will sit on 22 acres of land above Main Street, on Iotla and Crisp Streets. Ryan does not know exactly what the plans for the development will look like, since the town will decide that.

"The reason Tim can't show you a layout design is because it's going to be done in the charrette," said Brown.

Visual representations of opinions and plans will be drawn and posted so people can immediately visualize their ideas and follow the design progression.

While the plan has not yet been drawn, the principles Ryan subscribes to will direct the process.

His development ideas are part of a movement called New Urbanism, which designs walkable, diverse, envi-



A rendering of a sample streetscape from Allison Ramsey Architects, the firm involved with the Sanctuary project.

ronmentally friendly neighborhoods with a focus on nearness and community.

New Urbanism rejects the traffic, expense and suburban sprawl of large cities, and instead designs communities the way they were built a hundred years ago.

The idea is to have everything close, with houses near the street and each other, small yards, safe streets, sidewalks, trees, and garages along a back alley. Front porches are an essential part of the design.

"You create this sense of community. You meet your neighbors, children play," said Ryan.

Since historical restoration and appropriate architecture is also a principle of New Urbanism, the design will follow a more traditional, Victorian style that fits with Franklin.

"If we do this right, this could make Franklin more like Franklin, and that's our goal," said Brown, who consults with developers and towns wanting to use New Urbanist designs.

The homes will be "green," with energy-efficient insulation, as much solar-power as possible, and native plants used for landscaping.

The Sanctuary Village will be close enough to walk to Main Street, both cutting down on traffic and boosting downtown business. The community will feature a path along a creek, a park, and will be close to the

Greenway. Integration of small stores and neighborhood centers is a part of this walkability. Ryan wants the community to include a small convenience store with essentials so residents don't need to get in the car and drive. The store could also be a gathering place for the neighborhood.

"All of these concepts create this sense of place," said Ryan.

Some existing neighborhoods with a similar traditional design are the Village of Cheshire in Black Mountain, and the historic Montford neighborhood in Asheville.

Ryan, who used to be a partner of a produce company in Miami, fell in love with Franklin when he and his wife, Iva, came to visit.

"We were here vacationing like so many, and we were drawn to Franklin and the community that exists here," Ryan said.

He has three children, one in college in Florida, one a rising senior in high school, and the last in fifth grade.

"Life here is very rich, as opposed to the fast-paced, in-your-face life of the big city," said Ryan, adding, "We want people to experience that."

He said his family will be the first to move in to Sanctuary Village when it is built.

"We've been blessed to come here," he said. "We're following a path. I think doors open and close for reasons." He said God has led him.

Ryan wants The Sanctuary Village to be both a model for a community and a model for future business between developers and communities.

"We really, desperately need a neighborhood model that's not a suburban model, that's appropriate for where we are – a traditional mountain village," said Brown, adding later the danger of having only one choice.

"If we had only the current models, we would suburbanize Macon County in a heartbeat."