

SOUTHERN VILLAGE *A New Old Neighborhood*

An historical perspective for The Chapel Hill Historical Preservation Society

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Southern Village History

Visitors to Southern Village say it feels like a new “old” neighborhood – the ambience of an established neighborhood coupled with new homes on narrow, tree-lined streets. They say the Village Center feels organic – a retail, office and residential mix that

evolved over time. They praise having a church, school and daycare in walking distance of so many homes.

By many measures, Southern Village is a success. It has won design awards and has been recognized as a premiere example of traditional neighborhood design in national publications such as Time, Better Homes and Garden, The Wall Street Journal, Builder Magazine and U.S. News and World Reports. Planners, elected officials and developers from across the nation frequently tour the community. It has been studied as a successful example of Smart Growth and New Urbanism in numerous planning and transportation conferences. Housing values have appreciated phenomenally, and the Village Center, known as Market Street, is alive with shopping, services, dining, entertainment and employment.

As a Chapel Hill neighborhood, Southern Village had a unique genesis. It is the product of exemplary community planning and a development team committed to creating an authentic village-style development.



1989

A town looks into its future

Chapel Hill has a deserved reputation for good long-range planning – establishing historic districts, protecting its watersheds, resisting sprawl with an urban services boundary, preserving rural buffers to the north and south. In 1989, local leaders began to plan the town’s southern quadrant, at that time largely undeveloped.

This planning process strove to avoid suburban sprawl, preserve environmentally sensitive areas and promote public transportation. The Southern Small Area Plan, adopted in 1992, covered more than 3,000 acres of mostly rural land and recommended that a 300-acre site become a mixed-use village. Rezoning followed, transferring density from areas with beautiful vistas, sensitive slopes, streams and important hardwood forests to a 300-acre site close to UNC and Chapel Hill’s downtown. The Southern Small Area Plan set the framework for a village, but did not prescribe details for its successful creation and design.

1992

The right developer, in the right place, at the right time

Coincident with the Town’s consideration and approval of the Small Area Plan, D.R. Bryan of Bryan Properties, Inc., was looking for an opportunity to apply some forgotten development practices that were based on old, time-tested planning principles.

In the late 1980s, D.R. gained awareness of New Urbanism and neo-traditional neighborhood development, pioneered by architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a husband-wife team based in Miami. They designed Seaside, Florida, the granddaddy of New Urbanist neighborhoods. Three other New Urbanist neighborhoods were started in the late 1980s and the early 1990s – Harbor Town in Memphis, Kentlands in Gaithersburg and Laguna West in Sacramento.

It was Southern Village that brought this trend to North Carolina.

Early in the planning stages of Southern Village, a UNC graduate student in planning and business approached D.R. and offered to help plan and create the community. The arrival of Jim Earnhardt, an enthusiastic apostle of New Urbanism, was a blessing. He became the day-to-day project manager

*For more information on Bryan Properties visit
www.bryan-properties.com*

for Southern Village, someone who could implement the plan well because he understood the goals. Jim lives and works there today, as a partner in Bryan Properties.

To design Southern Village, D.R. and Jim felt they needed to examine more than New Urbanist principles and out of state communities.

“We asked ourselves, ‘What neighborhoods are people willing to pay a premium to live in?’ We realized that in most towns, the answer was neighborhoods built between 1890 and 1920, before the automobile gained such a powerful influence on neighborhood design,” D.R. said.

So D.R. and Jim studied many North Carolina neighborhoods that pre-dated World War II – Cameron Park and Hayes Barton in Raleigh, Dilworth in Charlotte. One useful model, partly because of its topography, was West End, Winston-Salem’s first streetcar neighborhood. They examined everything -- the relationship of houses to each other, their relation to the street, house design, vegetation, street design.

“We ended up patterning Southern Village after these early 20th century neighborhoods that were characterized by wide sidewalks, rear alleys and a corner grocery that people could walk to,” D.R. said. “We were determined to build a community that was for people rather than for cars.”

The development team created a land plan that met these goals but was also sensitive to the many slopes and streams in the Southern Village topography. They developed a book of design



guidelines that addressed everything from street width to building height to a building’s distance from the street. The street pattern was a modified grid, with connections everywhere and no culs de sac.

Walkability – the critical feature of a neighborhood designed for people rather than cars – was achieved with this pervasive interconnectivity and sidewalks on both sides of every street. Equally important was a design that would slow traffic so people would feel comfortable walking. Narrow streets, on-street parking and street trees are features that welcome pedestrians and slow automobiles.

Another goal of the development team was to reduce the number of average daily trips by one-half. Elements that work together to achieve this goal are the transit-friendly design and park-ride lot, streets that are attractive to bikers and walkers, and the location of many commercial and civic functions, as well as jobs, on Market Street.

Some challenges along the way

The key challenges arose from the same source as did the project’s strength – it was a different approach to development, unlike other projects in the market, both in its residential and commercial components.

In the early days of Southern Village, the sales staff had to convince potential homeowners to purchase lots that were one-tenth to one-third the size of the competition. This was difficult early on; there were no new communities nearby that used traditional neighborhood design principles that could serve as models. Initially, the sales staff referred prospective buyers to those early 20th century jewels in Raleigh and elsewhere. This comparison was helpful to some buyers, but not all. Selling a vision is not always easy.

However, after the first phase was completed, prospective buyers could better understand how the neighborhood would look and function. The company then began to experience the strong demand for new homes, townhomes and condominiums that continued until the neighborhood was completed.

Completing Market Street was similarly difficult;



nothing quite like it had been attempted here. Certain town restrictions – limiting size of commercial establishments and locating the commercial area off the main highway – effectively precluded any large companies from considering the village center.

Again, unexpected players walked onto the scene and made a big difference. John Fugo and Christine Edwards, chief operating officer and president, respectively, of Montgomery Development Corp., moved their business and their family to Southern Village. They became D.R. and Jim’s development partners for the Village Center, and built the 300, 400, 410 and 700 Market Street buildings, as well as The Lumina Theatre.

A close-knit working partnership among these people has created the Market Street of today. It is difficult to overestimate the work involved. Recruiting Weaver Street Market took time and patience, but was well worth the effort. Most of the village’s retailers and restaurants are locally owned new starts.

O2 Fitness has thrived and expanded. The service tenants of Market Street – medical, legal, financial, dental, personal care – have remained happy with their location. Several have expanded in size.

D.R. and John continue to nurture the Village Center, almost like parents. They built the stone stage and they underwrite special events on the Green. Of course, there is the steady work of keeping the place leased and maintained. But they also constantly look for ways to improve facades, lighting, landscaping – the overall look and feel of the place.

Bringing amenities and conveniences to Market Street was neither easy nor accidental. “We’ve worked very hard to attract businesses and services that will enhance the lives of our residents and make the daily experience more convenient,” D.R. said. “We want the Village Center to be the best place to work in the Triangle. In seeking tenants, scheduling entertainment events, and even selecting bushes and benches, we are always keeping this goal in mind.”



A Snapshot of North Carolina's First New Urbanist Community

The Southern Village Master Plan encompasses 312 acres. Roughly 230 acres are developed and the remaining 92 acres are in open space, greenway and park land.

This mixed use neighborhood has 1,150 residential units, presenting a variety of types and styles: 530 single family homes, 250 apartments, 230 condominiums and 140 townhomes. Residential lofts are located in the Village Center above retail stores. One Village Center building is entirely condominium homes. The housing closest to the Village Center is multi-family. Outside this ring of attached housing are the single-family homes. They are oriented toward the street and most have front porches. The styles range from traditional colonial to side-entry Charleston, with garages are in the rear to make the streetscape more attractive.

Though lots are smaller than the typical suburban lot, residents enjoy ample green space in the common areas. The 1.3 mile greenway runs through the middle of Southern Village and eventually will connect to bike and pedestrian paths along Morgan Creek and a town park adjacent to the Southern Village.

Above all, Southern Village is a walkable neighborhood, with sidewalks on both sides of all streets. Street trees, narrow street widths and on-street parking work together to slow down traffic. The 3,000-plus residents are within walking distance of all the services provided by their own downtown, Market Street.

Market Street is the heart of the community – a lively, viable commercial area with a church, a daycare center, a grocery store, a variety of shops and services, a movie theater, a fitness facility, and outdoor entertainment events open to the general public year-round. Market Street's focal point is a large village green with a performance stage. Surrounding it are two- and three-story buildings that vary in architectural style and include the retail stores, offices and lofts. Market Street has 252,500 square feet of retail and office space.

Thanks to an open-minded developer who values both careful planning and strong collaboration with the community, Southern Village also includes important public services: Mary Scroggs Elementary School, Chapel Hill Daycare, Christ United Methodist Church and a Town of Chapel Hill Park and Ride lot (450 spaces, served by the town bus system).

The Southern Village you see today is the result of extensive research, careful design, attention to detail, and developer D.R. Bryan's unwavering commitment to a key principle: "We were determined to build a community that was for people rather than for cars."

- 1989–1992** Chapel Hill develops a Small Area Plan for the town's southern quadrant
- 1992** Southern Village tract is placed under contract
Southern Village master plan submitted to the town
- 1993** Approvals granted for master plan, rezoning for eastern half of site—northeast tract (phase 1), apartments, park-ride lot, and village center (Market Street)
- 1994** Road construction begins
Corner Cafe approved
Collaboration (among developer, town, school system) begins for elementary school
Infrastructure in Phase 1 residential starts
First lots sold to builders
- 1995** First home occupied
Day Care special use permit approved
Infrastructure for Market Street Phase 1 starts
Phase 1 townhouses approved
Corner Café opens
Park-Ride Lot opens
Southern Village Apartments open
- 1996** Chapel Hill Daycare opens
Remaining special use permits approved by town
- 1997** Infrastructure on Phase 2 residential starts
Greenway construction begins
- 1998** Southern Village Racquet and Swim Club opens
Condominiums first phase construction begins
- 1999** Christ Church opens
First commercial building on Market Street opens
Mary Scroggs Elementary School opens
Market Street infrastructure is completed
- 2000** Lumina Theatre opens
Better Homes & Gardens house opens for touring
- 2001** Condominium final phase completed
Bike and pedestrian improvements completed
Infrastructure for last residential phase completed
- 2002** Weaver Street Market opens
Several Market Street buildings completed
- 2003** Last new home sale
- 2005** Final Market Street building completed

A Timeline of Key Events