

Kentucky 54 corridor will only 'continue to explode'

06/14/05

By [Keith Lawrence](#)
Messenger-Inquirer

About This Series: This is the final day of a three-day series looking at the development of Kentucky 54. Sunday's article looked at how growth was slow to come to the area, but has boomed in the last five years. Monday's article explored the emerging traffic problems and potential solutions for easing congestion.

"I live in The Brooks," Scott McCain says. "I'm not looking forward to the traffic delays on Kentucky 54. But I am looking forward to nicer restaurants and more shopping opportunities out here."

McCain is Owensboro city executive for BB&T, which is building a new branch in Woodlands Plaza, a shopping center under construction at Fairview Drive and Kentucky 54.

Ken-tucky's largest Wal-Mart supercenter opened last month diagonally across Kentucky 54 from Woodlands Plaza.

And two other banks, five restaurants, an auto dealership, a liquor store, a car wash and assorted other businesses are in various stages of development along Kentucky 54 today.

"We signed our lease in May '04," said Ryan Rutman, one of the owners of Anytime Fitness, a 5,700-square-foot upscale adult fitness center scheduled to open this summer in Woodlands Plaza.

"With the residential growth, the new Wal-Mart supercenter and the demographics out here, we thought this would be the best location for us," he said. "Things are happening on Kentucky 54."

That's just a taste of what's to come, those who study development along the highway say.

"It's going to continue to explode," McCain said.

"We've had branches out here since 1989," he said. "But we're consolidating both of our branches on Kentucky 54 into one super-branch that should be open by November. Obviously, Kentucky 54 is a major growth corridor. That's why we're making this major investment out here."

"Start at Heartland," a subdivision off East Byers Avenue near East Parrish Avenue, says Gary Noffsinger, executive director of the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission. "That's where the commercial development will start."

Looking at a map in his office, Noffsinger says, "There's about 61 acres between there and the beltline available for development."

Across the beltline, a company called B&K Development recently paid \$2.4 million for about 75 acres of the old Pennyrile Mobile Home Park property.

Rumors say something big is planned. An announcement is expected later this month.

That's one of the sites being studied by Bring Back Baseball, a local committee hoping to bring in Frontier League baseball and build a \$7 million stadium.

Hotel possible?

"If the baseball stadium uses part of that property, you may see a hotel out there," Noffsinger said.

Rodney Berry, a BBB member, said a decision hasn't been made on a location for the proposed stadium.

"There's some property behind Wal-Mart that may go commercial," Noffsinger said. "There's property across Kentucky 54 from Thorobred Acres and in front of Thorobred Acres. Lake Forest has undeveloped frontage that will probably be commercial. There's still a lot of potential out there."

In fact, Noffsinger's office has identified 317 acres available for commercial development along Kentucky 54.

And 40 percent of the 122 acres already zoned commercial in the Kentucky 54 corridor is still undeveloped, he said.

But Noffsinger isn't expecting a major shopping center in that part of the county.

"I would anticipate that it will be largely strip centers and stand-alone buildings," he said. "I don't think we'll see a Towne Square Mall or Wesleyan Park Plaza out there."

But David Appleby of Massie-Clarke Development, the company that developed Villa Point shopping center on Kentucky 54 in 1981, isn't so sure.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see some large shopping centers out this way," he said. "I really expect to see some big box stores -- books, sporting goods, stores we don't now have in Owensboro. There's a lot of retail that we don't have here and it's getting awfully hard to develop on Frederica Street."

Massie-Clarke still has 20 acres available around Villa Point for development, Appleby said.

"I've had inquiries about everything from purchasing a few acres to purchasing everything," he said. "I get a lot of calls from out-of-town developers. They hear things are happening out here and they want to be part of it."

'We're excited'

Appleby said Massie-Clarke prefers to build and lease.

"We've been out there this long," he said. "We'd like to stay and be part of what's happening. We're excited about what's happening, but it didn't happen as fast as we expected it would."

Thompson Homes has six acres in front of Thorobred Acres zoned for commercial development.

It almost sold part of that property for a Burger King restaurant in 1997. But residents of the subdivision went to court and successfully blocked it.

The property will eventually be developed for businesses, Tommy Thompson, president of Thompson Homes, said recently.

He also owns the former Alstott's Ace Hardware building near the subdivision.

"Hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't call and ask about it," Thompson said. "I've heard everything from renovating it to tearing it down and building something new."

The building has about 14,000 square feet, he said.

"Commercial development is meeting the pent-up needs of the residential property that has already developed," Noffsinger said.

From Jan. 1, 1980 to Dec. 31, 1999, a total of 1,345 residential lots were created in subdivisions off Kentucky 54, along with 19 commercial lots.

Since Jan. 1, 2000, a total of 636 residential lots and 19 commercial lots have been created.

"Over the next five years, Kentucky 54 will be growing to meet the needs of the community," Noffsinger said. "Businesses want to be where other large retailers are. For years, 54 has been growing in residential development. That will continue.

"There's more potential out there. There is little entertainment out there now. But I think we'll see entertainment opportunities out that way."

Homebuilders say the Kentucky 54 area hasn't come close to being maxed out.

East growth to continue

"I really believe that over the next 10 to 20 years, 75 percent of the residential development in Daviess County will be in the east -- from U.S. 231 to U.S. 60," says Bill Jones, one of the developers of Lake Forest.

"The sewers are out here now, and it's the natural way to grow," he said.

Jones said, "We've been building out here for eight or nine years. We have about 250 houses in Lake Forest now and another 125 to 150 to go. The Brooks has 21 or 22 houses now. There will be 100 when we're finished."

It will take about five years to complete both subdivisions, he estimated.

"We have some potential commercial frontage on Kentucky 54," Jones said. "There's an awful lot of commercial development going on right now, and it's going to continue going east. We have commercial property from Millers Mill Road to Lake Forest."

Jagoe Homes' Heartland subdivision isn't technically in the Kentucky 54 corridor.

It's inside the beltline, off East Parrish Avenue.

But it's a mile or less from the new Wal-Mart. And Kentucky 54 becomes East Parrish at the beltline.

Scott Jagoe said 368 of the 800 lots there have been developed.

That leaves room for 432 more houses.

"We'll probably be half finished by this fall," Jagoe said.

One of the attractive features for Heartland, he said, is the lack of traffic problems that are found just across the beltline.

"We have no traffic problems," Jagoe said. "There's a stoplight on East Byers and Parrish. And there's a stoplight at Highland Elementary, where the kids go to school. And you can also come out onto 26th Street going into town."

Thompson, whose company has built more than 1,000 houses in the Kentucky 54 corridor since 1978, is looking for more land out there.

Thorobred East, with 500 homes, is full, he said. So is Old Mill, a Martin-Thompson development with 130 houses.

Ditto for Woodland Crossing, 32 houses, and the Woodlands, 45 houses.

There's one lot left in Steeplechase, Thompson said. That will make 80 houses.

And The Downs, with 225 houses, has room for 15 more.

"We're looking for more property out there," Thompson said. "It's going to continue to develop. All the rooftops came out to Kentucky 54. There are two new schools out there. It's only natural for commercial to follow."

"Wal-Mart will increase traffic and accelerate both commercial and residential development," said Tom Shelton, superintendent of Daviess County schools. "So will the bypass extension. It's supposed to have an exit ramp at Pleasant Valley Road that will tie to an extension of Fairview Drive."

Calumet Trace will also be extended to link Fairview with Pleasant Valley, Thompson said.

Noffsinger expects commercial development to follow the new roads off Kentucky 54.

"We may see businesses along the extension of Fairview Drive to the bypass extension," he said. "That wouldn't surprise me."