

# Late Boomer

## Kentucky 54 growth has finally accelerated

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When Paul and Marion McCarty moved into the old school at 3305 Fairview Drive in 1957, the address was different.

What's now Fairview Drive was Hagan Lane, a gravel road.

"There was nothing out here then, just a few farms," Marion McCarty said recently.

Now, when she looks out across her back yard, she sees Kentucky's largest Wal-Mart supercenter with acres of cars parked in front.

And Fairview Drive, which will one day be extended to Pleasant Valley Road and a new section of the Wendell H. Ford Expressway, is quickly becoming a major thoroughfare.

"It's going to be interesting," McCarty said of the changes that are coming to the booming Kentucky 54 area. "But we don't have any plans to leave."

Today, nearly a dozen projects, costing millions of dollars, are in various stages of development on Kentucky 54.

And more are being talked about.

The change, long predicted, has come quickly.

Tommy Thompson, president of Thompson Homes, has built more than 1,000 houses in subdivisions along Kentucky 54 in the past 30 years.

But he still remembers getting lost back in 1976 when his father, Bill Thompson, sent him out to look at a farm that would eventually become Thorobred East subdivision.

"He said to go out Leitchfield Road," Thompson recalled. "I got lost. I don't think I had ever been out that way in my life."

**In this aerial view looking east along Kentucky 54 nearly a dozen projects, costing millions of dollars, are in various stages of development. Kentucky 54, also known as Leitchfield Road, is a relatively short highway, stretching roughly 51 miles from the U.S. 60 bypass in Owensboro to Leitchfield in Grayson County. Photo by Gary Emord-Netzey, M-I.**

Kentucky 54 is a relatively short highway, stretching roughly 51 miles from the Ford Expressway -- also known as the beltline or the U.S. 60 bypass -- in Owensboro to Leitchfield in Grayson County.

It's also known locally as Leitchfield Road.

In Leitchfield, they call it Owensboro Road.

### **Mostly farm country**

Until the 1980s, the Kentucky 54 area in Daviess County was mostly farming country.

The only population centers were Whitesville, incorporated in 1867, and Philpot, which began life in 1875 as Philpott Station, a stop on the local stage line.

In 1889, the Owensboro, Falls of Rough & Green River Railroad opened the area with rail service to the Ohio County coal mines. The line, later the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad, closed in 1982.

"Thompson Homes pioneered that area," Thompson said of the urbanization of the section of Kentucky 54 between the beltline and Thruston-Dermont Road.

"We had been building in the southwest quadrant of Owensboro, but the airport and the floodplain blocked further development in those directions," he said. "We thought the Kentucky 54 corridor had a lot of promise. It was close to the bypass and there were no drainage issues."

Today, there are 14 subdivisions along Kentucky 54 between Owensboro and Philpot, says Gary Noffsinger, executive director of the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission.

Census records show that the Kentucky 54 corridor grew by 1,573 people -- to 7,414 -- during the 1990s. The second-fastest growth was in the area just east of Kentucky 54 -- up 1,007 people to 9,180.

Noffsinger's records show that in the 20 years from 1980 through 1999, a total of 1,345 residential lots and 19 commercial lots were created in that area.

But in the past five years alone, 686 residential lots and 19 commercial lots have been created there.

Since 2000, Noffsinger said, 464 residential building permits and 13 commercial permits have been issued for the Kentucky 54 area.

The residential permits equal 16.98 percent of the total 2,732 issued countywide during those years.

That's roughly one house in six.

From 1980 through 1999, 53 acres along Kentucky 54 were zoned for general business.

Since Jan. 1, 2000, another 69 acres have been rezoned for business.

### **Philpot wealthiest ZIP code**

Census records say that Philpot's ZIP code -- 42366 -- is the wealthiest in the region with a median income of \$58,190 per household in 2003.

Countywide, the median income was \$36,813.

The median home value in the Philpot ZIP code was \$130,440 -- well above the county's \$81,800.

Villa Point Shopping Center was the first major commercial development on Kentucky 54.

"There wasn't much out here when we came out here in 1981," said Dave Appleby of Massie-Clarke Development Co.

"In 1981, we sold the lot for the Shell station," he said. "We built the Sir Beef and Wyndall's Foodland stores first in 1982. Then came Hook's Drugs. It was still a two-lane road back then."

Massie-Clarke was ahead of its time, Appleby said.

"There were only two ways the city could grow residentially -- east and west," he said. "Frederica was going to be commercial."

Appleby said, "There are nice rolling hills out here that are very attractive for residential development. It was a foregone conclusion that this was where residential development was going to go."

Still, he said, "we thought commercial development would come sooner than it has."

A 1978 comprehensive plan prepared by the planning commission envisioned business and professional offices at East Byers and Parrish avenues and a community shopping center near Kentucky 54 and Thruston-Dermont Road.

But some residents weren't eager to see commercial development.

### **Business development slow**

In 1997, residents of Thorobred East went to court to prevent Burger King from building a restaurant near the entrance to that subdivision, citing concerns about traffic.

And a year later, Independence Bank had to fight to win approval for a 12-acre development on the southwest corner of Kentucky 54 and Fairview, which included a branch of that bank.

"It took a long time to get people interested in that area," Chris Reid, the bank's president and chief executive officer, said recently.

It wasn't until 2003, when Wyndall's Enterprises opened a new \$5-million 40,000-square-foot Foodland supercenter at 3232 Villa Point that the Independence Bank development really took off.

"We're doing five times the volume we did when we first moved out here in 1982, and our customer count has more than doubled," said Ted Belcher, president of Wyndall's Enterprises.

"For so long, we were out here by ourselves," he said. "I think when Independence Bank built their branch, that started people looking at this area. We were probably five years too soon in coming out here. But it's been a great location.

"There are a lot of nice homes out here and the per capita income level is about the highest in the county. The soccer fields being built by the county on Fairview Drive will increase traffic. The volume at our fuel center has more than tripled since it opened."

"I never imagined that area would develop the way it has," said Tom Shelton, superintendent of Daviess County Public Schools.

"We plan as well as we can," he said of the school system. "We've built additions to Highland and Countryside schools and we built Meadow Lands (on Hayden Road) in that area to be central to the growth out there."

"It's becoming a hodge-podge of city and county out there," said City Manager Bob Whitmer.

"Wal-Mart, the new Woodlands Plaza and most of Villa Point are in the city," he said. "But the CVS pharmacy on the other corner of Kentucky 54 and Fairview Drive isn't."

Whitmer said he isn't sure why that section of Kentucky 54 hasn't been renamed East Parrish Avenue.

East Parrish now ends at the bypass, he said.

"We're looking at our transit routes to see if we need to serve that area with buses," Whitmer said.

City police patrols have been added on Kentucky 54 and Fairview Drive since The Brooks subdivision was annexed.

But most other subdivisions, other than Heartland, have remained unincorporated.

### **Annexation opposed**

In 2000, homeowners in The Woodlands considered annexation for better fire protection. But a majority voted against it, citing higher taxes.

"It will be difficult to annex existing subdivisions," Whitmer said. "The people who live there realize they can utilize many city services without paying for them. They don't see an advantage to annexation.

"We need to commend planning and zoning for requiring that area to be five-laned years ago. Can you imagine what it would be like if all that was two or three lanes?"

Local officials announced plans in 1983 to build a new five-lane highway, extending Parrish Avenue from Chautauqua Park to the bypass and then five-laning Kentucky 54 from the bypass to Thruston-Dermont Road, roughly two miles east.

It was completed in 1988.

"We're pleased with all the development out there," said Daviess County Judge-Executive Reid Haire. "But it does create problems."

The county, he said, has always provided snow removal for subdivisions.

"But our equipment isn't designed for cul-de-sacs with mailboxes and parked cars," Haire said. "The city doesn't clean subdivisions streets and we may have to stop it. It's getting to be expensive."