

Greenville

design

downtown's hottest trend

mixed use developments

+ green sustainability

companies making the most out of reusable materials




mixed use (developments)

Mixed-use developments are the current standard for developers in downtown Greenville, but can the city sustain the continued addition of these developments to the downtown landscape?

Text | By Nicole Livengood
Photography | Nill Silver Photography



The Field House



According to Mary Douglas Hirsch, Downtown Development Manager for the City of Greenville, development has slowed because of current financing conditions, but it hasn't stopped. "Things are definitely happening downtown," says Hirsch. "While Greenville is not immune to the current state of the economy, we are very optimistic about downtown's future."

Urban mixed-use development is a risky business for all involved due to the magnitude of each project, but the expansive RiverPlace development, McBee Station, the Bookends, Field House and others are breathing new life into city life in downtown Greenville.

The Hyatt property set the stage for downtown development in the early 1980s. As the redevelopment of Main Street progressed, mixed-use properties became the standard, offering residential space, office space, retail and restaurants under the same roof. City Economic Development Director Nancy Whitworth explains that urban mixed-use development is an effective method of infill, cutting down on urban sprawl and centralizing downtown growth and development.

RiverPlace is downtown Greenville's largest mixed-use development thus far. Sitting on the banks of the Reedy River, the \$250 million project is a collaborative effort between Hughes Development, Cooper Carry, Allora, LLC, Innocenti & Webel and Windsor/Aughtry Company. The property, to be completed in three phases, will include nine buildings on 10 acres of land. Currently in phase two, it consists of a parking garage and 720,000 square feet of office, retail and living space including: Bounce Agency, Talloni Shoes, Michelin on Main, Starbucks, High Cotton, Lazy Goat, a 115-room Hampton Inn, 5,000 square feet of artist studios, and two condominium developments.

Some office space is for lease within the property, but development realtors say they have not felt the pinch of the economy for this centerpoint of Greenville's new development landscape.

Bob Hughes, CEO of Hughes Development, explains that he has been working on

RiverPlace for almost twenty years. "These complex projects, I believe, are the highest calling for a developer," says Hughes.

He believes mixed use properties are popular because more people are returning to a more centralized lifestyle, resembling a time before automobiles took over our lives "In life, the one thing you can't get more of is time," he points out.

Many people are looking to simplify their lives, and whether they are moving their business, home or both downtown, the effect is a bustling downtown all hours of the day and night. The lucky few who work and/or live at RiverPlace boast about their view. The building has an excellent panoramic of the sunrise and at night, the lights from the development reflect off the river

and you can hear music coming from one its many restaurants or from a riverside concert.

The new downtown mixed-use developments are providing an influx of businesses and city dwellers to downtown Greenville, many of whom are tapping back into the urban lifestyle that dissolved in the Upstate during the 1960s due to suburban sprawl. Downtown



RiverPlace



The Bookends

developers are taking a page from history and reincorporating living space back into the downtown landscape, adding a new dimension to the city.

From the standpoint of economics, practicality and space utilization, mixed-use developments just make sense, says Nancy Whitworth. They bring a vibrancy to the area and minimize the financial risk of a single use, large scale building. Typically,

“Big Box” retail venues tend to have high turnover and are left empty, but mixed-use development offers a versatility that single-use development cannot. The Hyatt is a prime example of how multi-use properties continue to change and grow with the current climate, cutting down on the need for redevelopment.

Bo Aughtry of Windsor/Aughtry Company, the developer behind Main

at Broad, a space offering 65,000 square feet of office/retail space slated for completion sometime in early 2010, says the theory behind mixed-use properties is synergy. This type of property embodies the whole point to an urban lifestyle. “People are able to shop, dine and work all within the same structure,” says Aughtry.

A synergistic relationship is also reflected in the partnership between public and private sectors in many of the multiuse properties downtown. The City of Greenville played a big role in the \$65 million RiverPlace development and owns the parking garages attached to Wachovia Place and Poinsett Corners. They also own the Spring Street parking garage attached to The Bookends mixed-use development. In addition, the City is responsible for the public foot traffic areas and streetscape. As developers have explored downtown locations, the City has stepped up to provide necessary infrastructure upgrades to accommodate continued growth.

McBee Station, owned by Gibson/McBee Station Properties out of Atlanta and developed by Russ Davis, is an example of the success of these properties. To accommodate the new development, the City resurfaced the street and made necessary streetscape upgrades. The development opened in 2007 and contains 30,000 square feet of commercial use property including a Publix, Staples, a chiropractic office, upscale retail stores, restaurant space, and apartment and condominium units. McBee Station is currently around 90 percent leased, and has one of the most profitable Publix stores in the Upstate.

Field House, located adjacent to the baseball park at West End, is also thriving. The developer of the retail portion of the property, Centennial American Properties, says that though Port City Java vacated recently, filling the space is not going to be a problem. Compadres Mexican Restaurant occupies part of the 57,000 square feet of commercial space in the development and is looking to expand their restaurant

into more space within the development. More and more individuals and businesses are moving into the West End, says Centennial's Rebecca Gault, and most of them are coming from outside the Greenville area. The fact that residents of the 40 condo units, developed by The Croft Company, are able to step right outside their doors to catch a Greenville Drive baseball game at Flour Field is a huge draw.

Main at Broad has seen some turnover of potential tenants due to the economy according to Charles Reyner of Windsor/Aughtry, but he is confident that the development, which includes a 135-room Courtyard Marriott and Rick Erwin's new 250-table restaurant, Nantucket Seafood Grille, will be leased at 60 percent at completion.

One of Greenville's shining new stars is the NEXT Innovation Center scheduled to open this June. This 60,000 square foot development on the corner of Church Street and University Ridge in the former Cameron and Barkley Company Building, will be the home of operations for NEXT member companies including: human resource software company SinglePoint, software companies Gnoso, Vigilix LLC and ProActive Technology, and Clemson's NextStart Program, which nurtures innovative entrepreneurs. The property contains office suites up to 15,000 square feet, single rental cubes, single offices, conference rooms and a stimulating package of amenities including a Wii game room, café, showers and comfortable common space to encourage collaboration among tenants. The property will also offer affordable housing in its 24 condominiums, but these will not be ready until a redesign is approved by the City. The cutting edge development was designed by a partnership between the Chamber of Commerce, the City of Greenville, Hughes Development Corporation and NEXT, the Upstate's resource collaboration of organizations that provides service to high impact technology companies.

"Greenville's downtown is a deal closer for bringing new industry into the Upstate, and multi-use properties

play a large role in overall feeling of our downtown," says Hal Johnson, CEO of Upstate Alliance, which is a public/private regional economic development group designed to market the Upstate region and attract new investment. Individuals are increasingly interested in a place where they can work, but on the weekends walk around, get some coffee, do their grocery shopping, ride their bike or go running and relax without having to get into their cars,

and downtown has it all. Mixed-use properties are adding a new dimension to downtown, allowing Greenville to compete with larger cities to continue to bring in new populations.

Though overall development has slowed down due to the current economic climate, the mixed-use trend does not look like it will be slowing any time soon. After all, says Johnson, "Downtown Greenville is the heartbeat of the Upstate." 



McBee Station