

New projects in works for tracts across Belmont area

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The land quietly being assembled in the Belmont neighborhood by developer Tim Crawford may not look like much now.

Boarded up mill houses, car lots and vacant warehouses dominate the landscape. And environmental issues from more than 100 years of industrial use have long pushed new projects to the sidelines.

But the more than 6 acres Crawford is acquiring is guiding through the rezoning process have the potential to shift development

patterns, with some brokers suggesting the area's potential rivals that of South End.

With its stellar views of the city skyline, greenway connectivity to midtown's retail and restaurants, relative affordability compared with Dilworth and South End, the Belmont neighborhood is on the brink of breaking out, says John Nichols, owner of The Nichols Co. in Charlotte.

"I get calls every day from people looking to invest in Belmont," says the longtime commercial broker. "There are some great buildings there, and the neighborhood is convenient to both NoDa and Plaza Midwood."

Large-scale redevelopment is already happening at the



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former Piedmont Courts public housing site. That 1940s complex is being replaced by Seigle Point, a mixed-income community slated to open in 2009. Charlotte-based Grubb Properties is developing Seigle Point.

The former Morningside Apartments complex is being replaced with a \$400 million urban village near the corner of Morningside Drive and McClintock Road in the Plaza Midwood-Central venue corridor of east Charlotte. Morningside is being developed by Firitas, a company headed by Rob Pressy of MECA Properties in Charlotte.

The Belmont neighborhood can seem like a rabbit warren of dead-end streets bounded by North Davidson Street, East 10th Street, Hawthorne Lane and Parkwood Avenue. It has a population of roughly 3,300, and its average household income is around \$72,000; the city's average is \$193,000.

That anonymity is rapidly changing, says Keith MacVean, land development program manager for the Charlotte-Ecklenburg Planning Department.

"It's a great location in terms of its proximity to uptown," he says. "We're seeing redevelopment and residential investment in that area."

Crawford has assembled nine parcels totaling 6.4 acres occupied by warehouses and other businesses along East 10th Street and Seigle Avenue.

Several of those parcels are in the hands of longtime owners Allison Fence Co. Inc. and Crowder Construction Co., although city officials say they expect

Crawford to close on the property any day.

In January, Crawford filed a rezoning petition for the parcels to boost residential density. The rezoning, approved in May, prohibits auction sales, gas stations, off-street parking and building-material sales.



photo GREG RUSSELL

Intermezzo restaurant, which recently opened at 1427 E. 10th St., joins a growing list of retail, restaurant and office tenants that are helping remake the Belmont area.



Crawford, president of Citiline Resortline Development & Construction in Charlotte, filed for the rezoning under the name Victoria Land Co.

He has also consulted with the city about buying acreage from its Central Yard when the property is released for

sale in 2010, says Jim Schumacher, Charlotte assistant city manager.

For more than 100 years, the city has used 30 acres in the center of the Belmont community to store police cars and repair trucks. The city's sanitation department and garbage truck storage is also part of the Central Yard.

Bounded by Seigle, Otts Street and Louise Avenue, the Central Yard has been under scrutiny for the past year by City Council, which wants to see a better use for the land — namely residential development.

"Some of the facilities there are obsolete and need to be replaced," Schumacher says. "The yard has been there since that was the edge of the city."

Council voted earlier this year to find a new location for the light cars and trucks that take up about 5 acres in Bel-

mont. That land will go up for sale once the city decides where to move those vehicles.

The sanitation department, however, is not going anywhere, Schumacher says. He expects the 5 acres to provide a buffer between residential growth and the garbage trucks and new sanitation offices that will be built next year.

"That land is valuable because it's close to the center city," Schumacher says. "But land zoned for industrial inside Charlotte is somewhat scarce, too, so it's valuable in both respects."

The redevelopment trend has helped Nichols change the face of the gateway to the Belmont neighborhood — little five points, the convergence of Central, 10th and Louise Avenue.

His company helped sign a new restaurant and an architectural studio that will anchor the intersection.

Intermezzo opened recently at 1427 E. 10th St. It serves pizzas and more than 1,900 square feet of an old brick building at the corner of 10th and Louise.

Laughing Dog Architecture is in the process of revamping a former brick service station that faces Central Avenue and points toward Plaza Midwood.

Nichols says property got expensive in Plaza Midwood so investors started looking to the fringes and discovered Belmont.

Its redevelopment will mirror that of South End but will happen faster because it is more walkable, better connected to uptown and has a large neighborhood to work from, he says.

"We feel like we are involved in something that has a cool future," Nichols says. "I ride through Belmont once a week to look at how everything is changing."

Research director Amy Shapiro contributed to this report.



MacVean



Schumacher



Nichols

