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Phillips Farms plan aims to retain land's character

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Fisher & Arnold, Inc., has completed a development plan for Linda and Jerry Phillips' 66 acres at Houston Levee and Macon Road.

The plan calls for the property to be developed with a mix of commercial and residential parcels with about 36 acres dedicated for commercial use and about 30 for residential.

The Phillipses won zoning approval on the plan in August and will begin selling the land to developers in phases over the next 12-18 months. They sold the corner parcel to **Walgreen's** earlier this year.

The Phillipses are surrounded by neighbors despite living on their own 66-acre lot. The couple purchased the property 25 years ago and moved there permanently nearly a decade ago.

"We like to say we live in a gated community of one," Linda Phillips says. "In a mile radius, I only had 22 neighbors, and now I have thousands."

The Phillips Farms development plan was created with several specific precautions in mind. The couple wanted flexibility in parceling the property so it would be possible for them to live on the land as long as possible. Jud Te Paske, Fisher & Arnold land planning department head, says the plan was also developed with several connecting streets that allow residential owners to reach the commercial uses without getting on the major roadways.

The larger lots are an identifiable part of the neighborhood and are providing the core area, as opposed to a minimal number of larger lots being strung along the entry. A stream channel that runs through the property will be maintained as a green space, and deeper landscapes along the street should enhance the green setting.

Other property owners in the area include developer Jackie Welch, who owns about 40 acres on the northwest corner; a partnership called Cordova Ridge, which owns property on the southeast corner; and a mix of owners on the southwest corner.

Te Paske says the No. 1 goal of the Phillips Farms master plan was to make the property distinct and differentiated from the other three corners.

"And to make it as green as possible without putting them at a competitive land economics disadvantage," Te Paske says.

The land is bordered to the west by Houston Levee and to the south by Macon in an area of East Shelby County known as Gray's Creek. Over the past several years, the question of what to do with the vast 58-square-mile area has been an ongoing struggle between local residents and developers.

The original Gray's Creek Development Plan was created with heavy input from the public, including residents, environmentalists, politicians and developers. Both city and county governments adopted that plan. However, it is only a policy and has not been routinely adhered to by the Shelby County Commission.

The Phillips Farms development plan adheres to the Gray's Creek plan, "with the idea of producing something that is context sensitive and contributes to the overall fabric of the community," Te Paske says.

The Phillipses say they want to live on the land as long as they can, but as they are getting older, they are hoping to turn a profit on the wise investment they made a quarter of a century ago. Land prices in the area have soared and now could fetch more than \$20,000 per acre.

"I've been active in this community for a long time, and I wanted to continue to live here and enjoy where I live," Linda Phillips says. "I want to still be appreciated by the community and not do something way out of character."

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