

Fast-growing McCordsville wants to be more than a drive-thru

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Published July 20, 2017 | Updated

It's been almost 30 years since McCordsville became a town.

Now, it wants to be a place.

The Hancock County municipality northeast of Indianapolis is one of the fastest growing in the state. Its population surged from 1,500 people in 2005 to 6,000 now — with officials estimating it could reach 11,500 by 2020.

Town officials said homeowners are attracted to the town because it's close to Geist Reservoir and Hamilton and Marion Counties.

But new commercial and retail development has been slow to follow, and for the tri-county residents it remains mostly a pass through to somewhere else. McCordsville has a no-name downtown and a main thoroughfare with three names. And it's still best known for a pastry shop, Tim's Bakery, as it has been for decades.

That's slowly starting to change.

A Meijer opened in May on West Broadway Street, which is Ind. 67 through the center of town. Daniel's Vineyard opened in the spring and Scarlet Lane Brewing has been there for three years.

"The Meijer is a big deal for us because residents had to go to Indianapolis and Fishers to shop," said Tonya Galbraith, the town manager. "And the vineyard is offering a lot of fun events. It gives people a venue to come to and enjoy that is out of the ordinary."

But the biggest changes are still to come

McCordsville, Cumberland and Hancock County are planning to revitalize 10 miles of Mount Comfort Road with a mix of commercial, retail and industrial development. The development will coincide with an Indiana Department of Transportation plan to realign the corridor.

One of the first orders of business will be to find a new name for Mount Comfort Road, which also is known as County Road 600 West near Cumberland and Olio Road at the north end near Fishers.

“There is going to be branding, a messaging, involved in this,” Galbraith said. “We can’t market a corridor that nobody knows the name of.”

A 36-page economic impact study prepared by a consultant offered recommendations. One possibility envisioned a retail strip through McCordsville with a 3,500-square-foot coffee shop, an 8,000-square foot joint use retail space, a 7,000-square foot office space and 5,000-square foot restaurant.

Another suggestion was for a 48,000-square foot, single story, light industrial factory and another was for a 14,500-square foot, two-story medical office building.

A priority in McCordsville will be attracting businesses downtown to bring it to life. The center of town near Mount Comfort Road and Ind. 67 is a hodgepodge of businesses that include a Mexican restaurant, liquor store and car dealership.

“We were only incorporated in 1988, so we have yet to establish a downtown like some older small communities like Fortville,” Galbraith said. “It starts with a strong visionary process, which we are doing. But we are a blank slate right now.”

Town Councilman Larry Longman said the community would try to attract a developer with a large-scale plan. Such a plan was submitted in 2006 but the recession hit and it was scrapped.

“It was for about 50 acres and was retail-driven with storefronts on the ground and some residents on second floor,” he said.

Longman said he would like something similar proposed, adding that new residents are demanding a more lively downtown.

“Our demographics are pretty good with households incomes probably higher than elsewhere in Hancock County, but not as high as in Hamilton County,” Longman said. “The population is to the point now where more is expected.”

Some commercial development is taking place. The 42,000-square-foot Hancock Wellness Center recently was completed next to the Hancock Regional Medical office building. Nearby, the Traditions at Brookside senior center opened.

Daniel and Kim Cook just opened a winery and event venue east of Geist Reservoir at 9061 N. 700 West.

Daniel's Vineyard has a 24,000-square-foot building with an upper banquet hall that holds 400 people, a lower banquet hall that holds 375 and a tasting room for about 175 guests.

At Scarlet Lane Brewery, Chief Executive Officer and head brewer Eilise Lane said the business has become a town-gathering place, of sorts.

"We hold events for nonprofits and during the week. This is a regular stop for people on their way home from work," Lane said.

In fact, she said, that was the reason the Oregon-based brewery chose McCordsville in the first place.

"We saw there that breweries in struggling lumber mill and fishing towns created a hub and helped revitalize the whole town," said Lane, a native of Coatsville. "We saw similarities here."

The customers have increased every year and the brewery has expanded hours and now offers food. Lane said the new Meijer is a good example of how new businesses can feed off each other.

"We've made many emergency runs over there to pick up ingredients in brewing like vanilla beans, cocoa and pomegranate juice," she said. "It's a lot more convenient for everyone."

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