

Vision for Welaunee ‘Heel’ taking shape

Almost twice the size of neighboring Canopy, plans call for single-family homes, apartments, retail and restaurants



The Tributary community in Nassau County is providing inspiration for developers’ plans for the Welaunee “Heel.” Seen here is the Tributary’s Lookout Amenity Center, which includes a pool, pickleball and clubhouse. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

TaMaryn Waters Tallahassee Democrat | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

A 900-acre, master planned community is primed to be part of the next big wave of growth for northeast Tallahassee. • Early on, new owners GreenPointe Developers are calling it “The Heel,” a literal reference to the segment of the sprawling Welaunee Plantation property that’s sliced into three geographic areas: the Toe, the Heel and the Arch. It’s located just north of the intersection of Interstate 10 and Mahan Drive. The name will likely change in time.

The vision calls for a mixed-use development made up of single-family homes at various price points, apartments and commercial property for retail and restaurants. It would be almost twice the size and a neighbor to Canopy at Welaunee, a 500-acre, master-planned community built by Premier Homes of Tallahassee.

The Heel is the latest project for GreenPointe Developers, a real estate land development company based in Jacksonville with 16 active projects throughout the state. The company has developed more than 80 large-scale communities in the Southeast with more than 100,000 units.

Greenpointe is in the process of acquiring the Welaunee land, but the



A map of the so-called Welaunee Heel. NAI TALCOR

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The Heel

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purchase price will not be revealed until they close on the property in 2024.

This would be the company's first entry into Tallahassee, a city it has been eyeing for years and has top company executives with direct ties to Florida State University.

Liam O'Reilly, who received his bachelor's degree from the FAMU-FSU College of Engineering in 2009, shared the company's plans with the Tallahassee Democrat. The primary focus, he said, will be to build a "lifestyle focused" community that includes amenities like trails and dog parks.

"We want to be good stewards of the city," said O'Reilly, a regional president at Greenpointe. "We're not going to come in and be in and out. We want to be here, and we want to be here for a while."

The overall development is projected to take 10 to 15 years for it to be completed. In that period, O'Reilly said the projected overall infrastructure investment is more than \$100 million.

While talking about the company's early plans, he said some of the property's light industrial areas may be attractive to companies looking to be near the new Amazon fulfillment center that's slated to open later this year.

He said Amazon's presence in Tallahassee was one of several factors that prompted the company to act on the property.

Another factor was the explosive growth already taking shape along the Mahan Drive corridor.

Examples include Harbert Realty Services, based in Birmingham, Alabama, purchasing the former Cross Creek Golf Course off Mahan Drive and several new housing communities mushrooming along the gateway road, including Camelia Oaks, Avery Park and The Retreat at Mahan.

Brad Parker, a partner at TLG Real Estate Services in Tallahassee, said the need for more housing is critical within the city limits and said Welaunee offers the real estate to inject more housing into city's ailing market.

When asked why developers are interested in Welaunee, Parker said, "It's all that's left."

"We're hemmed in by plantations on the north that are not going to develop and the only way you can go is east," Parker said. "Southwood is slowly developed, but where the school systems are and where everybody wants for new construction type stuff is north and east Tallahassee."

'We understand there may be concern'

Developments, big and small, often become a point of controversy in Tallahassee. The Welaunee Plantation property itself — which represents one of the biggest Tallahassee development landscapes in the northern portion of the city since Killeam Estates brought 3,800 homes to more than 4,000 acres — has been a lightning rod.

Major Comp Plan amendments for Welaunee's Arch drew sharp criticism from environmental advocates in recent years over plans to create five districts that would all maintain their own land use designations and building densities. None of them include Canopy at Welaunee that's already underway or what Greenpointe is planning with The Heel, which shares a northern boundary with the Arch.

At The Heel, O'Reilly said 25% to 30% of the property will remain as open space or conservation areas, adding the development will include miles of trails and connections to the Miccosukee Greenway.

"We understand that there may be concern from some community groups in Tallahassee ... We're just hoping to listen to them," he said. "If there is a middle ground there, then yeah, we want to be proactive in that."

To get in front of any concerns and questions, the developer created an online Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) at <https://theheeltallahassee.com/>

"Current demand for housing is extremely high, inventory of existing homes remains low, and prices are continuing to rise," the FAQ states. "The existing shortage inhibits economic growth, and building new homes in areas that have been previously identi-



The TrailMark community in St. Johns County is providing inspiration for the developer's plans for the Welaunee Heel. PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT



fied as approved growth corridors in the Comprehensive Plan will help alleviate this shortage and the high demand."

One inevitable issue that will likely surface with a development of this size is traffic.

GreenPointe Developers plans to complete a traffic analysis during the planning stages, and "any necessary infrastructure improvements required by the city will be incorporated in the design of the development," according to its website.

"A new connection to Miccosukee Road will not be made for a number of years — it is not part of the first phase of the development," the website states. "There will be a turn lane and other improvements to Mahan Drive, and a new signal will likely be added, determined in consultation with the city of Tallahassee and (Florida Department of Transportation)."

In an exclusive interview with the Democrat, O'Reilly talked about the evolving plans for The Heel, the projected timeline and potential conflicts the company hopes to address and avoid. Here's what he said:

When GreenPointe Developers become interested in Tallahassee?

In 2015, GreenPointe took a more serious look at the capital city and potential large swaths of land, including the Fallschase mixed-use development, where residential construction is currently underway.

O'Reilly said it wasn't the right time. A few years ago, O'Reilly said his company was contacted after the Welaunee landowner was interested in selling a portion of the estate.

"I think the landowner wanted someone who was thoughtful and not someone that was just going to kind of come in and piecemeal things," he said. "They wanted more of a bigger vision, kind of a cohesive community of mixed use where there's residential and non-residential."

What's the timeline for the project?

It will take more than a decade for plans to come to fruition. The company hasn't submitted its Planned Unit Development application to the city of Tallahassee yet. The permit process, along with scheduled public hearings, will likely take 12 to 18 months.

O'Reilly said it's unlikely that the project will break ground this year, adding the property had already undergone an exhaustive vetting through the Comprehensive Plan (a blueprint for growth in Tallahassee) about 20 years ago.

Greenpointe is not seeking any land-use variances from what is allowed by the Comp Plan. He said the Comp Plan allows for up to 2,100 residential units within The Heel, which includes single-family homes, town houses, apartments, villas and inclusionary housing. However, he said market demand will drive how many homes are built.

How do you plan to address potential environmental impacts?

O'Reilly said the company held an informational meeting last month and in-

vited residents and groups to hear plans for The Heel. They continue to gather information about what stakeholders want and don't want to see in the project.

While the project is in its early stages, he said the property contains wetlands and floodplain areas that will be preserved. In addition, he said, a large portion of the site will be used to add buffers to greenspace, adding "they're going to remain natural."

He said significant areas in the Heel will certainly have to be cleared for the project, but developers will take an inventory of "the unique natural features" and preserve "signature areas of tree canopies" and oak hammocks.

"It's a balancing act," he said. "In order to develop the property and get infrastructure in the ground, that is something that has to happen."

What are some examples of projects GreenPointe Developers has done?

The Tributary is a 1,550-acre, mixed-use development that opened in July in Nassau County. It has roughly 3,200 single-family homes, townhomes and

apartments and amenities like a resort-style pool, an on-site gym and a range of sports courts and entertainment areas.

Another potentially similar project is called Trail Mark in St. John's County. It's a 1,400-acre master planned community with 2,200 single family homes and town houses, along with 300 apartments.

Some of the amenities include several miles of connected walking and cycling trails and a kayak launch to Six Mile Creek that connects to the St Johns River.

Will GreenPointe Developers build any of the homes located at The Heel?

No, Reilly said. The company doesn't build homes at its projects. The plan will be to partner with homebuilders, especially local companies, when it comes time to build the residential component.

There will most likely be half a dozen or so builders tasked to build homes that hit different price points, including the first-time home buyer to custom estate homes.

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Obituaries

Sharon Edith Teel (Crow)

Sharon Edith Teel (Crow), 76, passed away Wednesday, January 18th, 2023 in Santa Barbara, California, where she has lived for the past 12 years. Sharon's family held a small private reflection in Tampa on January 28th, and they will gather over the summer in North Carolina to remember her in Scaly Mountain, where so many great memories were created at her parents cabin.

Sharon is best remembered as independent, determined, and a deeply caring listener, but her love of family surpassed all. At the age of 17, she first asserted her independence by leaving her hometown of Miami. Somewhat secretly from her parents, she obtained a scholarship from her local church and told her parents (not asked) that she was heading to Tallahassee to attend Florida State University. She supported herself for 4 years at FSU and graduated in 1968. She married Bob Teel, also a student at FSU, on December 31st of that year and moved shortly thereafter to Sumpter, SC, where Bob was assigned to Shaw US Air Force.

Although Sharon worked throughout college, her first full-time job was teaching grade school in rural Sumpter. In many ways, teaching was a thread that connected Sharon's career and passions throughout her life. Whether it was young school children, her patients as a hospice counselor, or the students she mentored at Alpha Chi Omega as alumni leader, she listened carefully and provided insightful and heartfelt guidance. Earning a masters degree in clinical social work was a professional accomplishment that perfectly represented her strengths.

Sharon eventually moved back to Tallahassee to raise a family and remained for nearly 30 years. After spending some years near her sister Kathy Taylor and nephew Mike Crow in Lakeland, FL, she lived the last 12 years in Santa Barbara, CA, near her son's family.

Sharon is survived by her daughter Cristina Bellew (Teel), her husband David, and their children Avery, Eliot, and Evan, who live in Fernandina Beach; her son Robert Teel, Jr, his wife Julie Teel (DeVine), and their children John and Andrew, who live in Santa Barbara, California; Sharon's brother David Crow, who lives in Asheville, NC; her sister Kathy Taylor (Crow), who lives with her family in Tampa. She is preceded by her parents John Crow and June Crow (Goodbread) and her brother Michael Crow.

Sincere thanks for the amazing care Sharon received from Covenant Living at the Samarkand, Assisted Hospice and Cottage Health in Santa Barbara.



The Tallahassee Amazon warehouse, as seen on Jan. 4. The fulfillment center was a draw for developers planning a large community on the Welaunee Heel. CHASITY MAYNARD/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

