

Friday, December 25, 2009

Housing developments targeted growing suburbs, downtown

Austin Business Journal - by [Kate Harrington](#) ABJ Staff



Nick Simonite

Several downtown condominium towers were built or started during the decade.

[View Larger](#)

Austin has long beckoned to job seekers, musicians and students alike, and the past decade has been no exception.

With that population growth has come a lot of residential real estate expansion. The past 10 years have seen Austin's residential population stretch to surrounding towns and cities, and fill in parts of the city formerly occupied by used-car dealerships and old warehouses.

Among the most significant factors to have impacted the region's residential real estate industry are the jobs added during the middle part of the decade, said Eldon Rude, the director of housing research company Metrostudy's Austin office.

According to the Texas Workforce Commission, 114,000 new jobs were created in the Austin area from 2004 to 2007. And during that period, Rude said, the building community started more than 55,000 new detached homes in the region.

The past decade has also brought new housing types to the region, including traditional neighborhood developments and mixed-use, master-planned communities. Terry Mitchell, one of the developers involved in Plum Creek, a 2,200-acre master-planned community 20 miles south of Austin in Kyle, said when that neighborhood began its first phases more than 10 years ago it was responding to a need.

"Austin is a creative and innovative city, and people were asking for something different, and expected to see results," Mitchell said. "Plum Creek, which began in 1998, was the first traditional neighborhood development in the area that sought to change the residential real

estate models of the past. With Plum Creek came a new neighborhood incorporating the principles of new urbanism.”

Bringing new urbanism to a traditionally suburban area in Plum Creek’s case meant a connected and walkable community, alley-loaded garages, traffic-calming elements, landscaping, and a sidewalk and trail system.

New urbanism has also had a chance to flourish in an already urban Austin downtown; several new condominium and apartment communities have taken shape in the past decade, bringing thousands of residents into a new, dense neighborhood.

But while it remains a healthier and more affordable residential market than many metro areas, Austin is facing an affordability crisis, said Kelly Weiss, executive director of PeopleTrust.

“If the city is going to provide any city incentives or public investment for development in exchange for affordable housing, then long-term affordability needs to be a requirement,” Weiss said. “Austin experienced a boom in the past decade, and we were not armed with the growth management tools — density bonuses, affordable housing incentives, infrastructure planning. I would have started the comprehensive planning process sooner and implemented meaningful development incentives to achieve the community goals of affordable housing and open space.”

Courtesy of JB Goodwin