

AN UNCOMMON COMMONS

Are you wondering what is happening at the main intersection in New Concord? On the northeast corner of Routes 40 and 83, buildings have been razed, dirt is being moved and dust is flying, bricks and mortar are rising out of that dirt. What is coming to town is “An Uncommon Commons!” – a new development whose official name is The Community Commons.

According to developer Jim Lepi, the “driver” behind the project was The Community Bank due to the Bank’s desire to open a branch in New Concord. The website of The Community Bank provides an interesting history of the Bank. Back in the 1890’s, Crooksville was a bustling community with retail shops, pottery and other manufacturers – but no bank. Residents had to travel to other communities to do their banking, and this was the era before automobiles. So a group of businessmen in the town got together and formed The Crooksville Bank, which opened in December of 1902. Epraim Bennett, S.H. Brown, Wilson Winter, J.L. Bennett, and W.N. Burley served as the original Board of Directors. For 86 years, The Crooksville Bank’s only office was in Crooksville. Then in 1988, the Bank opened a branch on Maysville Pike in South Zanesville. In 1992, the bank changed its name to The Community Bank believing that this would communicate its passion for serving the local community and accommodate its vision to expand further into the general Muskingum County area. The bank opened offices on the west side of Zanesville (1997), north end of Zanesville (2003), and the east side of Zanesville (2006). In 2007, the Bank moved its headquarters to North Fifth St. in downtown Zanesville. Then in 2009, a branch opened in Fazeysburg. Now, The Community Bank is coming to New Concord!

The Community Bank believes its mission is to support its local community by offering a full range of services to that community and for those services to be “the same or better services than offered by the corporate banks,” which are based in far-away communities. Customers can expect to find all of the personal banking services they need: checking, savings, CDs, loans, and mortgages. On-line banking is available as well as card services. The Bank provides investment and wealth management services including annuities, trust services, life insurance, estate planning, investment management, college savings plans, and IRAs. The Bank also serves the business community with checking and savings accounts as well as loans and lines of credit. In keeping with its local philosophy, the Bank has hired Derrick Gingerich as the manager of the New Concord branch. Derrick is a lifelong resident of Norwich and has been working in the New Concord area since 2005 as a personal banker. He graduated from John Glenn High School and then completed his bachelor’s degree in Business from Muskingum University in 2005. The Bank expects the new office will open in early October, and Jim Lepi says the construction is “pretty much on schedule.” Until the New Concord branch opens, the bank “invites you to visit Derrick at the Bank’s east office at Route 40 and Airport Road. You may also reach Derrick at 740-826-1100 or via e-mail at dgingerich@thecombank.com.” Michael Steen, President of The Community Bank, reports that the residents of New Concord are “very supportive of bringing a true community bank to town.” He says he “enjoys the history of the area and especially of the National Road” and says they have tried to design the new bank building to reflect that historic look. Mr. Steen reports the bank plans to host an open house for the community and hopes as many people as possible will attend.

With the Bank construction well under way, Jim Lepi states that he will be turning his attention to the rest of The Community Commons. Foundations will be laid in late August for a structure that combines retail space with residential condominiums. The retail space will face south, towards the Bank and Route 40 and will consist of a series of store fronts that have a “Main Street look” consistent with the small-town atmosphere of New Concord. Five condominiums will occupy the second floor over the retail shops, but will face north and be accessed from an extension of the alley that runs behind the houses on that side of Main Street. Taking advantage of the hill on the property, these condos will be all on one level and handicap-accessible. Jim and his wife Bobbi are handling the marketing and sales for the retail space and condominiums through their office, Lepi and Associates [740-439-6666 or 740-891-1068 (Bobbi’s cell) or e-mail at blepi@lepirealestate.com]. Jim and Bobbi report that they understand and are able to tailor their project to reflect the small town of New Concord since they live in Dresden and developed a project there consisting of 20 residential condominiums. The Lepis also developed the McCoy Crossing Shopping Plaza in Dresden.

Bobbi and Jim explain that the total amount of retail space in The Community Commons is 8250 square feet and that this space is extremely flexible. According to Jim, “this space was designed with few interior columns for easy division and flexibility—making it possible for a business to have a small shop or the majority of the space for a large enterprise.” The building is designed to be energy efficient and will require little maintenance. The exterior will be primarily brick, stone, and stucco. Shops will be fronted with awnings and signs illuminated by overhanging goose-neck lighting in keeping with the requirements of the village. Jim and Bobbi explain that the business tenants can either rent the space or buy “business condos” by purchasing the space their business occupies. Investors also might be interested in purchasing some of the retail space and renting it out. Plans are to eventually demolish the building on the property that currently is home to The Computer Place and for that business to move into the new retail space. Frank Donia, owner of The Computer Place, states that he is looking forward to the move. “I’ll have about three times as much space as I have currently.” Current plans are for The Computer Place to occupy a storefront on the west end of the retail building.

Like the retail shops, the residential condos are designed to be energy efficient and low maintenance. Bobbi explains that this should make for relatively low condo fees over the long run. The building is designed with a 50-year shingled roof, and the driveways will be concrete rather than asphalt. There is room for flower beds and shrubbery, but only a small area of grass to mow. The condos are over 1600 square feet, and the standard floor plan includes two bedrooms and two full baths. However, Bobbi and Jim explain that the initial buyers can arrange the interior floor space to meet their individual needs, and an architect is available to adjust plans as needed.

Jim says that the project expanded and is coming to fruition because of the great interest and cooperation from the New Concord village officials. “I came to work on the Bank development and found that the community was great and interested in an expansion of the project. Everyone has been eager to help and work with us. This is the main entrance to the village, and we all have been working together and involved in setting the right tone in keeping with the traditions and wishes of the New Concord community.”