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## Luxury trend finds Wesley Heights

### Neighborhood near uptown has affordable housing, and is adding condos

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Luxury condominiums pop up like spring flowers in the neighborhoods of south Charlotte.

Now, a similar trend is emerging in the burgeoning Wesley Heights revitalization area just west of uptown.

Origin Development LLC plans what it says will be the city's "greenest" and among the neighborhood's largest condos, off West Fourth Street Extension slightly west of the Interstate 77-Interstate 277 loop.

Prices at 24-unit Celadon will range from the mid-\$200,000s to the mid-\$400,000s for 900- to 2,076-square-foot townhome-style condos with such touches as Italian design gourmet kitchens and spa-like master suites.

Most of the condo and townhome development there so far has been tilted toward smaller units with fewer high-end features to keep prices in check.

"This is the first to take a more boutique approach," said real estate analyst Emma Littlejohn of The Littlejohn Group. "It indicates Wesley Heights is being propelled into a much more market rate neighborhood."

The project's Next Big Thing potential, real estate experts say, lies in the diversity it could bring to Wesley Heights. So-called workforce and affordable housing could be joined by more luxury townhomes and condos.

"The neighborhood is beginning to appeal to more upper end households," said developer Bobby Drakeford of The Drakeford Co. "This could be the start of a trend -- like in SouthPark."

He's developing Walnut Hill, about 40 condos (995 to 1,500 square feet, \$170,000s to \$250,000s) off Wesley Heights Way near West Trade Street.

Only 10 units remain for sale in the project, to be finished in July.

Most buyers, Drakeford said, are young people who see the potential of Wesley Heights and are willing to stretch financially to invest in the neighborhood.

Urban planners are encouraging residential developers to "jump" the I-277 barrier with housing projects that help fill the gap between uptown and westside neighborhoods.

Wesley Heights got a major boost in 2003 when developer Frank Martin's Landcraft Properties bought 25 acres between Stewart Creek and Woodruff Place for Lela Court, a 147-home infill development.

Any developer who wasn't watching then certainly is now.

Origin Development principal James Funderburk Jr. and partner Jim Hock discovered their wooded 1.4-acre site on West Fourth Street Extension through a real estate broker.

"It was perfectly oriented," Funderburk said. "It's on the greenway, on a mass transit route and only a quarter mile from the inner ring of Interstate 277."

The site is so close to the center city that a condo owner could bike or walk and leave the car in the garage.

From the start, Funderburk said, the developers saw an opportunity to do something special by saving a third of the trees and combining modern-minimalist design with environmental sensitivity and energy efficiency.



Rendering courtesy of Liquid Design  
Modern-minimalist style buildings in Celadon will be built among the trees to bring the outdoors in. Residents will have access to walking trails and a greenway.

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"Retaining the heavily wooded feel was important to me," Funderburk said. "I think a modern structure in the midst of the woods is a beautiful contrast."

Saving trees is aesthetically important to the neighborhood, he said, but it also reduces stormwater runoff, enhances the project's passive solar design and provides "a slice of nature" to townhome owners.

Some units will be larger than 2,000 square feet, comparable to what buyers might find in SouthPark or Dilworth, but they won't be as pricey, he said.

Funderburk estimates the average price per square foot at \$220, roughly \$100 less he says than a similar condo in Dilworth where land prices are higher.

Origin Development plans to start construction of the \$8.7 million project in May and complete work in early 2008.

#### DEVELOPERS MAKE GREEN HOUSING LESS COSTLY

Origin Development principals James Funderburk Jr. and Jim Hock spent nearly two years researching and planning Celadon.

Their quest for ideas and techniques took them to green building conferences in Los Angeles and Santa Monica, Calif.

They wondered why modern green design was so scarce in multi-family development.

"What we found was that development often follows the path of least resistance, which can tend to stifle innovation," Hock said.

Nationally, home builders say buyers are resistant to paying more for green features.

Convinced that eco-friendly features can be cost effective, they hired Liquid Design's Michael Williams and Gaurav Gupte, who are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certified.

Among the green features they've included:

- A light-reflective roof that incorporates "cool roof" technology.
- Dual-flush toilets to reduce water consumption.
- Energy efficient Fisher & Paykel appliances to reduce energy consumption.
- Recycled materials used for sound and thermal insulation.
- Bamboo flooring, which is grown sustainably without fertilizers or pesticides.
- Slow growing, native and drought resistant plants used in landscaping.
- Kitchen cabinets built to stringent European standards to greatly reduce urea-formaldehyde emissions.
- Recycling during construction with a goal of diverting 70 percent of construction waste from landfills.
- Materials generated by Celadon land clearing and excavating to be reused on the site.

#### CELADON OVERVIEW

**SIZE:** 24 "eco-chic" three-story, townhome-style condos on 1.4 acres site on West Fourth Street Extension about a mile from the intersection of Trade and Tryon streets.

**UNITS:** One-, two- and three-bedroom townhomes from 900 to 2,076 square feet, priced from the mid-\$200,000s to the mid-\$400,000s.

**FEATURES:** Private garages, balconies, dual lavatories and vanities in master suites, 10- to 20-foot ceilings, large windows, custom gourmet island kitchens.

**DEVELOPERS:** James Funderburk Jr., real estate investor whose career includes founding such clothing chains as Lotus, Civilian and Urban Evolution. Jim Hock, an experienced project manager and former vice president of marketing with Wachovia Securities.

**ARCHITECTS/PROJECT MANAGERS:** Liquid Design's Michael Williams and Gaurav Gupte.

**CONTRACTOR:** Sagehorn & Co., Inc.

**SALES:** Shane McDevitt and John Geuss of Helen Adams Realty. Sales and design gallery to open April 14 at 1430 S. Mint Street.

**INFORMATION:** [www.celadongreenway.com](http://www.celadongreenway.com).

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