

# Designed to fight sprawl

**The Kentlands, Gaithersburg, Md.**



**Live where you work . . .**

**Northgate Village, Kansas City, Mo.**



**Steps from the street . . .**



**And park in back of the house.**



KILEY CRUSE/THE WORLD-HERALD

Herb Freeman wants a "new traditional development" on a 160-acre site at 168th and State Streets. His home is currently the only structure on the land.



DEAN WEINLAUB/THE WORLD-HERALD



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

Residents have begun moving into Village Gardens near 61st and Pine Lake Streets in Lincoln. The neighborhood design seeks to combat sprawl by creating areas that encourage walking.

## ■ 'New traditional' community eyed for northwest of Omaha

BY DEBORAH SHANAHAN  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Herb Freeman envisions a neighborhood northwest of Omaha that has a town center, homes with porches out front and garages to the rear, narrow streets, and places to work, play and shop within a five-minute walk.

To help make it happen, he hired PlaceMakers, based in Miami Beach, Fla. The firm is flying a team of 15 — architects, planners, a lawyer, an artist, an engineer, a developer and marketing and public relations experts — from around the country to Omaha to conduct a five-day charrette, an intense planning and design exercise, beginning Tuesday.

Freeman also invited more than 100 local people with a wide variety of expertise and opinions. Participants are expected to include city planning, public works and public safety officials.

And he's asking the general public to participate by visiting a Web site — [www.whatsnewon-statestreet.com](http://www.whatsnewon-statestreet.com) — to see daily reports and drawings and to submit ideas.

The focus of all the attention will be 160 acres at the northeast corner of 168th and State Streets. It is rolling terrain that consists mostly of prairie grass and a small stream. The only structure on the site is Freeman's personal residence.

All four sides are bordered by land that is developed or in the hands of developers.

Freeman acknowledged that he was looking for a way to have his subdivision stand out from the others. But he said his travels and research have sold him on the New Urbanism concept of "new traditional development."

New Urbanism is a planning movement that seeks to combat sprawl by re-creating the type of design used before World War II — compact towns and villages with common areas that encourage walking and a diversity of people and uses.

The vehicle is de-emphasized. The garage or parking lot, for example, is in the back rather than the most prominent feature of a home's facade. And allowing mixed uses provides more opportunities to walk or bike.

Planners like the concept because it encourages more dense development and more efficient use of public facilities while preserving green spaces.

Developments using new traditional development principles have been built in 41 states, including Florida, Maryland, Tennessee, Oregon, Massachusetts, Texas and Missouri.

Lincoln's Village Gardens, spearheaded by the family that founded Campbell's Nursery, has just moved its first residents into such a neighborhood.

But Freeman's project would be a first for Omaha.

Omaha Planning Director Steve Jensen, who plans to participate in the charrette, said he hopes the project isn't the last of its kind.

"It's the kind of development that's happening across the country and that we haven't had anyone in Omaha try to do," Jensen said. "It's something we've been trying to encourage. Hopefully others will see it and say, 'Wow, that's pretty interesting. Let's try the same thing.'"

Freeman, chief operations officer of NP Dodge Real Estate's residential sales division, is a former majority owner and chief executive of CBS Real Estate Co. and a co-founder and former partner of Cormac Co.

He formed Full Circle Ventures Inc. to pursue new traditional neighborhood development.

Freeman has been involved in developing several of the area's conventional subdivisions, including Hawthorne near 180th and Q Streets, Crystal Creek in Gretna and Grayhawk at 144th Street and West Maple Road.

Those are good projects, he said, and probably 70 percent of buyers prefer those types of subdivisions.

"I just think now another way I've been exposed to has so many compelling advantages to it. I want to do it," Freeman said.

Typically, Freeman said, a developer determines an average lot size and asks his engineer to design a subdivision fitting in as

many lots of that size as possible.

"The lots all sell for about the same price," he said. "The houses sell for about the same price. So all the people have to earn about the same amount of money. You get a very homogeneous group of people."

With the new traditional approach, Freeman said, a neighborhood can have a wider variety of house types and prices, and the people will represent a wider spectrum of incomes.

As he put it, "If the idea is you want a five-minute walk to morning coffee and a newspaper, where's the coffee shop girl going to live?"

Freeman expects his new neighborhood to feature live-work sites, or buildings where someone could have an office on the first floor and live on the second and third floors, and ancillary buildings that allow a second residence above a garage on the same lot.

But the details will come from the charrette. The process will determine the next use for Freeman's residence and probably suggest the project's name, he said. He expects the charrette's product to be the final plan.

Since the planning involves his personal home site, Freeman said, the project is emotional and not about money.

But he believes if he follows the principles of new traditional development it will be profitable. The amenities in such developments add value, Freeman

said, and he'll be able to offer housing at more price points and get more units per acre and lower infrastructure costs per unit.

Carrie Campbell said sales at Lincoln's Village Gardens, 61st Street and Pine Lake Road, where construction began in November, have gone well.

Forty-five of 76 lots in the first phase have sold, 24 houses are under construction and two homeowners have moved in. A Festival of Homes is planned Sept. 9 through 17 to further introduce the concept.

The neighborhood's plan options were designed to resemble Lincoln's Woods Park, Professors Row, Near South and Country Club neighborhoods. More than 1,000 residences are planned.

A Village Center will include shops, restaurants and service businesses. The development will include 35 acres of parks and wetlands and sidewalks that are 5 feet wide.

"Once people see these projects, they want them and will buy in them," Freeman said. "Some people want the three-car garage facing the street and a fenced backyard. But 15 to 30 percent are definitely customers for projects like this, and I think that will grow as gas prices remain higher."