

# Wheeler set to see construction of 'shop homes' begin, bringing mixed-use vision to life



By **STEVE LACKMEYER**

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Construction continues at Wheeler with work transitioning to a more urban mix of housing and commercial space that will link the existing homes to the Ferris wheel overlooking the Oklahoma River.

Dubbed the "Spoke Street Shop Homes," construction will start next month on three-story homes with ground floors designed for retail, office, makerspace or workshop.

Josh Kitchen, vice president of Wheeler Home, revealed plans this week as contracts were signed for four of the first 10 of the shop homes.

"The vision all along with Wheeler is to have a truly urban walkable and bikeable community that has a wide variety of housing and commercial types," Kitchen said. "This product is very unique and innovative for Oklahoma City."

Construction of Wheeler, built on what was once the Downtown Airpark, started along the former runway in 2017 with the first house sold and occupied in 2019. That 14-acre first phase totaling 60 homes has 50 already sold and the remainder under construction.

Second phase construction of 100 homes, spanning 22 acres, started in March and will include a neighborhood park and pool. Kitchen said pricing will range from \$200,000 to \$700,000-plus with 100 different housing styles.

The area will wrap around on the south end of the development and will be east of a planned elementary school.

The Spoke Street project is designed by architect Sam Day, whose work on Wheeler dates back five years to when he designed the Wheeler Ferris Wheel Plaza. He is credited by Wheeler developer Blair Humphreys with setting the tone for design and urbanism for the project as well as tackling its mix of housing and architecture.

Spoke Street represents a change in style from the first two phases with brick veneer facades and a narrow street comparable to Carey Place just south of Oklahoma City University. The shop homes will each be 1,000 to 2,000 square feet, allowing space for the living and working units to function in tandem or independently. The Spoke Street homes will have alleyway access and parking and balconies extending out over the first floor.

Kitchen said contracts have been signed with buyers whose plans include offices for an attorney and accountant and a retail art gallery in the ground floor spaces.

Those buyers include Dustin Chilcoat, who has followed the Wheeler project since its inception when the airpark went bankrupt and the closed property was sold to the Humphreys family.

“I was running around there at the airshows before Wheeler was a project or at least the one I know about,” Chilcoat said. “And I’ve been watching as they’ve transformed this.”

While early planning was underway for Wheeler, Chilcoat and his wife Holly were building a business, Monte Christo Ironworks, which started with creating high-end iron doors and expanded into decor and art work.

“I would have loved to be out in Wheeler in the beginning but we have a small business and a great home Josh (Kitchen) built in 2011,” Chilcoat said. “We had no reason to move other than for what they’re doing.”

The Chilcoats employ 10 people, most of whom work in the Monte Christo Ironworks manufacturing warehouse near NW 4 and MacArthur.

“It’s where we keep our products,” Chilcoat said. “This area is known for building materials. But it’s hard to get builders and designers to come in. A lot of our clients in Edmond and Norman don’t mind coming downtown. It makes us more accessible even though it’s not that much further away.”

Chilcoat envisions the Wheeler shop as a display room where designers, builders and clients can meet to discuss projects and incorporate products that are on display. The gallery will be a part of that experience.

“I love having the ability to create it as a true art gallery,” Chilcoat said. “It helps with the brand we’ve created and we want to continue pushing it as high end.”

The new wave of construction coincides with the addition of the Terminal Commons in the former airpark terminal, an office and retail building and school.

The terminal renovation is complete and the opening of the all-day cafe is pending a reduction of the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Construction of the Big Friendly brewery and taproom next door is well underway.

Site work, meanwhile, has started on a three-story office and retail building to the south of Terminal Commons.

Construction is set to start this summer on the Western Gateway Elementary School funded through a tax increment financing district for the area that is scheduled to open for the 2021-2022 school year.

Wheeler is a 15- to 20-year master plan that envisions more than 600 homes spread out over 10 phases with the final shape and size to be guided by its residents, business owners and partners.

Wheeler represents the first new neighborhood built in the southside Capitol Hill area in decades and is across from Wheeler Park, one of the city’s earliest that was once home to the city zoo.

“The charm of the park is pretty special and we really like downtown,” Chilcoat said. “My family was part of Capitol Hill during its heyday. It has a special significance to me.”

Chilcoat said he is not concerned about proceeding as the country struggles with emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“For me, and as a business, we’ve continued to operate and work,” Chilcoat said. “Naturally a lot of times, when fear comes, we’re frozen in fear. I want to be a person of action and show the future is full of hope. Stepping into opportunities like this, you say and preach that narrative, but you have to match that up with decisions.”



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Steve Lackmeyer is a reporter, columnist and author who started his career at The Oklahoman in 1990. Since then, he has won numerous awards for his coverage, which included the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, the city’s...

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