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MIRAMAR

Latest development: land's end

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The age of the super-size subdivision is coming to an end in Broward.

In what will be one of the last large tract-home developments in the county, Miramar commissioners have approved the 491-home Sunset Falls development west of Interstate 75. The approval leaves only three other large, vacant tracts for residential subdivisions in the city. And Miramar is one of the few remaining Broward cities with any such tracts left to build on.

In the future, planners say, most new homes will be built on small, scattered properties or in high-rises in the eastern half of the county.

"There aren't going to be any more Westons in Broward County," said Bill Leonard, Broward County senior planner.

Weston, a city with 16,539 acres, was planned almost entirely by a single developer in the 1990s.

This month, Miramar commissioners approved the 500-acre Sunset Falls. The homes will surround a man-made lake that was once a rock pit. It's the last major development in the city's burgeoning west side.

The subdivision will neighbor the subdivisions of Silver Isles, Silver Falls and Sunset Lakes, which made Miramar the hot spot for homeowners looking for a slice of suburbia. Homes in Sunset Falls will start around \$400,000, according to developer GL Homes.

But Sunset Falls already has its detractors.

Fed up with traffic, crowded schools and a dearth of artistic culture, homeowners say they are frustrated with the western Broward sprawl.

"It's not the utopia I thought it was going to be," said Angel Ortiz, who moved to Sunset Lakes this year. "Current homeowners are in a pool of misery. It's not fair to bring in new homeowners to have to deal with the misery."

Weekday mornings, Ortiz, a network systems securities specialist, takes his daughter to Catholic school in Coral Gables.

"The commute is terrible, I have to cut in line just get on the interstate," Ortiz said.

Miramar, which earned a name for its mega-developments, only has four large parcels -- including Sunset Falls -- of vacant land available for residential projects in the city; three are east of I-75.

In all of Broward, only Parkland and Cooper City's Waldrep Dairy property have vacant tracts comparable in size to Miramar's. Not long ago, Pembroke Pines and Weston had many such tracts.

Hurricane Andrew, which destroyed 25,000 homes in South Miami-Dade in 1992, triggered a construction boom in Broward. These days, developers are scurrying to Palm Beach and Martin counties.

Much of the lure of Broward County is its suburban convenience -- there's hardly a block without a Publix, gas station or strip mall.

County planners say future development in Broward will take a "here-and-there" approach. Wherever there are small vacant parcels, or an old home that can be torn down, you're likely to find new condominiums and town homes. People may live next to downtown banks or old city halls.

Among urban planners, redevelopment and infill are the buzzwords.

"It is what it is," Leonard said. "We are going to monitor the growth and see what happens over time. We knew this was going to

happen."

At Sunset Falls, homeowners will get a 4,600-square-foot clubhouse with a fitness center, resort-style pool with spa and covered porch, two tennis courts, a basketball court, tot lots and a party pavilion.

In Miramar, homeowners say good riddance to the continued growth.

Western Miramar homeowners regularly start e-mail groups to find ways to alleviate the crowding. Once, some homeowners even considered seceding from the city.

City Manager Bob Payton said that Miramar, which has doubled in size since the '90s, is nearly built-out.

"Miramar's housing boom is coming to an end," Payton said. ``There isn't much virgin land available. What you will be seeing out of the city's developments is increased commercial, retail and office space. Most of the population growth will be in the central and eastern portion of Miramar."

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