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Anson's 1st sign is roadwork

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Officials open part of boulevard leading to development

A half-mile-long boulevard is open, marking the first visible construction in the sprawling Anson, Duke Realty's development of hundreds of millions of dollars in homes and businesses west of Zionsville.

Work begins next month on the first buildings -- apartments and retail space by Flaherty and Collins Properties -- in the heart of Anson.

"We will soon begin to see the vision" that has been evolving for nearly three years of planning and government approvals, said Tom Dickey, Duke's vice president and general manager of Anson.

Anson is a master planned development of 1,700 acres in Boone County along I-65 between the interchanges of Ind. 334 and Ind. 267. It's close to Zionsville, but tiny Whitestown has now annexed part of the site.

In a ribbon cutting ceremony last week, government and Duke officials opened a crucial section of Boone County Road 650 East, between Ind. 334 and Whitestown.

The curvy, two-lane country road is becoming a four-lane boulevard divided by a landscaped median and decorative lighting -- leading to the main entries into Anson. Two new roundabouts were installed, one of them at Central Boulevard that will cut into the middle of Anson.

"We borrowed the state highway department's 'hyperfix' method to rebuild (county road) 650 because we promised to have it reopened by the start of school last week," Dickey said.

The road is one of several existing county roads being rebuilt along with new boulevards that will feed traffic in and around Anson. Stone walls and 25-foot tall brick towers at the entrances will go up next summer.

This first phase of road work is being funded by a \$10.1 million bond issue sold by Boone County. The bond is due to be repaid through increased property taxes generated by the development. Duke has pledged to pay any shortfall if the new taxes fail to cover the bond payments.

Not just roads

As the road work and site grading continue this fall, Dickey said, some of the first buildings will begin to rise from the ground.

Flaherty and Collins will begin construction in September on two "new urbanism" buildings, each containing 4,645 square feet on the ground floor for shops and restaurants plus 40 apartments for rent on the second and third floors.

Jim Crossin, vice president of Flaherty and Collins, said Monday the brick buildings have a classic urban design like they were in a traditional downtown or main street.

The buildings to open next May will form two sides of Willey Square, one of the town centers in Anson. In about three years, Flaherty and Collins will build two more similar three-story, business and apartment buildings to complete the sides of Willey Square.

Flaherty and Collins also has a 15-acre site for 210 rental apartments starting in 2007. And the apartment builder has the rights to another 25 acres in Anson so that new apartments could continue going up to 2011, Crossin said.

Rents will be in the \$745 to \$1,275 a month range. While that may be a fairly strong market rate, he said it will be justified "because of the location away from the congestion of the Northeastside, the lifestyle and quality of the community, the nice amenities and the flexibility" compared to buying a house.

The first two buildings, 45 feet tall and built on a farm field landscape, will be visible to traffic on the busy stretch of I-65 near Ind. 334.

Also in Anson, construction is expected to begin by October on the first of the single-family houses, so model homes will be open by spring.

Duke is beginning construction on a speculative warehouse and distribution building, the first structure among several hundred acres earmarked for industrial development.

On the southside of Ind. 334, Duke soon will start a 38,000-square-foot strip shopping center that will become a companion to a future "big box" retailer. Dickey declined to name the retailer, but said it will be the likes of Meijer, Target or Wal-Mart, though there are no current talks with Wal-Mart.

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