

New construction: 323 single-family homes proposed west of Ann Arbor

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Birmingham-based Biltmore Development wants to construct 339 single-family homes in Scio Township.

Lizzy Alfs | AnnArbor.com

Following years of sluggish real estate activity across southeast Michigan, **David Stollman** of **Biltmore Development** (<http://biltmoredevelopment.com/>) believes the market is right for new home construction in Washtenaw County.

“There really hasn’t been any significant developments going in the ground since 2006,” he said. “The supply of developed lots is significantly reduced and the inventory for builders to build homes on is very low — almost non-existent. We felt it was a good time to bring a project forward.”

Biltmore, a century-old development company based in Birmingham, Mich., wants to develop a 323-lot single-family subdivision along the east side of Staebler Road between Jackson and Park roads.

The property is known as the former **Farmer Grant land**, and the portion Biltmore wants to develop is still owned by the Grant family.

The project is the first new subdivision of this scale proposed in Washtenaw County in years.

In June, home improvement chain **Menards** (<http://www.menards.com/main/home.html>) purchased (<http://www.annarbor.com/business-review/menards-completes-purchase-of-63-acre-jackson-road-property-for-74m/>) 63 acres of the former Farmer Grant property — with Jackson Road frontage — for \$7.4 million. The Wisconsin-based company is in the final approval stages before building a roughly 160,000-square-foot store on the site.

South of the proposed Menards store and south of Scio Township's **Honey Creek**, Biltmore hopes to develop about 130 acres of farmland into a residential subdivision.

"The location provides opportunities to dine, shop and recreate all within a few minutes from the home," Biltmore's preliminary site plan says.

Biltmore submitted a Honey Creek Planned Unit Development site plan to Scio Township, and the property has already been rezoned from General Agriculture to Multifamily, which would allow 591 dwelling units on the site. Single-family homes are permitted under the multifamily designation, but Biltmore submitted a Planned Unit Development because the proposed lot sizes are narrower than what's permitted, said Scio Township Planner **Doug Lewan**.

Biltmore's proposal comes as housing starts in Washtenaw County are on the rise (<http://www.annarbor.com/business-review/is-new-construction-back-residential-building-permits-up-35-percent-in-county/>), but residential building permits are still well below the county's peak during 2000 to 2005.

So far in 2013, builders have pulled 279 single-family construction permits, including 12 in Scio Township, according to data from the **Southeast Michigan Council of Governments** (<http://www.semco.org/>).

Homes are being built in already-developed subdivisions where construction was mostly stagnant for years, including Scio Township's Polo Fields, Legacy Heights in Saline and Kirtland Hills in Pittsfield Township. Meanwhile, regional and national players like **Trowbridge Companies** (<http://trowbridge-companies.com/>) and **Toll Brothers** (<http://www.tollbrothers.com/>) have re-entered the Washtenaw County market with plans to build (<http://www.annarbor.com/business-review/hideaway-lane-developers-revive-plans-to-build-19-homes-on-ann-arbors-north-side/>) several dozen homes.

For Biltmore, the new proposal is the largest project the company has proposed since before the economic downturn.

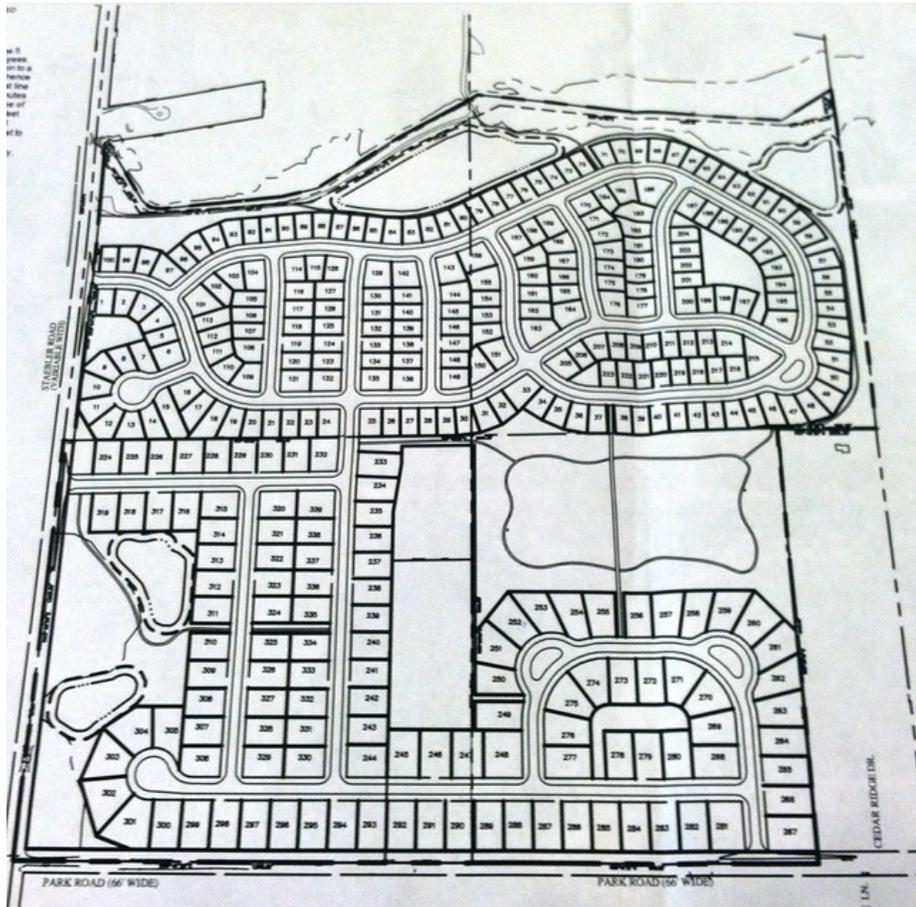
"There really has been no development on our part or really throughout southeastern Michigan of any significant size in the last seven or eight years," Stollman said. "We're encouraged by the economic indicators and by the success of builders selling homes in the market. We think that southeast Michigan has turned the corner and is very much headed on the upswing."

Biltmore has developed dozens of residential subdivisions in Metro Detroit; it also developed the **Barclay Park Condominiums** (<http://www.bouma.com/condo/barclay-park-ann-arbor>) on Nixon Road. In 2001, the city of Ypsilanti chose Biltmore to be the first developer of the Water Street property (<http://www.annarbor.com/news/ypsilanti/water-street-history/>). The city "dismissed" Biltmore from the project in 2004 when the two sides couldn't agree on who would pay for cleaning up the contaminated land.

The company plans to purchase the Staebler Road property in Scio Township for its subdivision development, said **Jim Chaconas** of **Colliers International** (<http://www.colliers.com/en-us>), a commercial real estate broker who has the property listed for sale.

"We had three or four people who wanted to (build here), but we worked on a deal with Biltmore," he said.

The subdivision would be developed in four or five equal phases over eight to 10 years, according to the plans. The north end of the site would have 215 lots called the "**Village Lots**," which are typically 60 feet wide and 100 feet deep. The south end would have 108 "**Estate Lots**," which are typically 85 feet wide and 120 to 140 feet deep.



Biltmore's preliminary site plan (it has since been slightly reconfigured) shows the potential layout of the project. Each box represents a single-family home, with the Village Lots to the north and Estate Lots to the south. 16 lots have since been removed from this original plan

Stollman said the company would develop the lots and then sell them to homebuilders to construct the houses.

"We haven't sold the lots as of yet, but we likely will start discussions with (homebuilders) once we've gotten further along in the site planning process," he said.

Stollman estimated the Village Lots homes would be priced between \$300,000 and \$400,000, and the Estate Lots homes would be priced between \$450,000 and \$600,000. He said those are estimates and the prices could change.

"The market has changed significantly from the very dark times during the recession, and we see a significant demand for new homes in the area," he said.

The average home sale price (<http://www.annarbor.com/business-review/real-estate-recovery-2012-washtenaw-county-home-sales-show-improvement-1/>) in the county is showing year-over-year gains since 2009. The average sale price in 2012 was \$210,616, according to data compiled by the **Ann Arbor Area Board of Realtors** (<http://www.aaabor.com/>). The average sale price in July (<http://www.annarbor.com/business-review/homes-are-selling-faster-in-washtenaw-county-july-data-shows/>) 2013 was \$263,978.

The plans show the subdivision would include more than 12 acres of contiguous hardwood forest. There would be setbacks from Honey Creek, walkways for recreation, and additional flood plain storage for Honey Creek in detention ponds.

The site plan went before Scio Township's Planning Commission for a first consideration and public hearing. Biltmore made changes to the project and resubmitted the site plan last week, said **Midwestern Consulting** (<http://www.midwesternconsulting.com/>)'s **Scott Betzoldt**, the civil engineer for the project.

Betzoldt said changes included: More open space and parkland were incorporated into the plans, a new pedestrian connection will

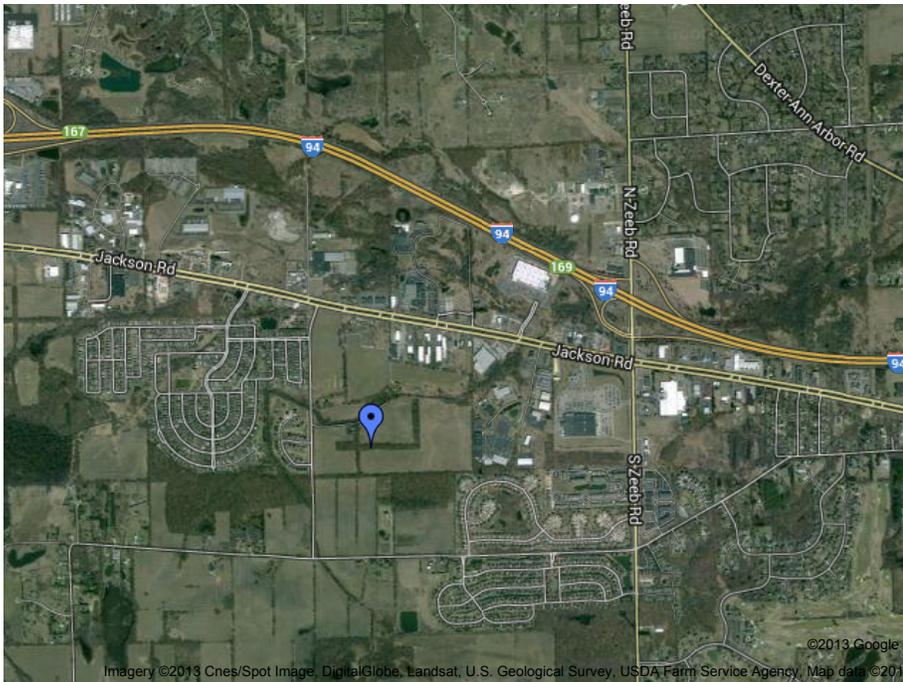
wind through the subdivision and up to Menards and its potential outlot properties, and a pathway will go through the 12-acre woodland preserve.

“We’re also working with the **Washtenaw County Road Commission** (<http://www.wcroads.org/>) and Scio Township right now about some utility grid upgrades and road improvements,” he said.

For Scio Township, the development comes on the heels of several other proposed projects in the area; Menards is in the final approval stages before building its store, 2 restaurants and multifamily (<http://annarbor.com/business-review/2-restaurants-apartments-proposed-for-site-on-zeeb-road-near-meijer/?cmpid=mlive-@mlive-news-a2>) housing is proposed on South Zeeb Road; and a Holiday Inn Express is proposed (<http://www.annarbor.com/business-review/holiday-inn-express-proposed-for-vacant-land-near-zeeb-road-in-scio-township/>) for vacant land near Zeeb Road and Interstate 94.

“I think, with the somewhat resurgence of the economy...you’re seeing a certain pent-up demand,” said Scio Township Supervisor **Spaulding Clark**. “Where three, four years ago you couldn’t build a house to save your life and you wouldn’t want to open a business, I think people are saying suddenly, ‘Things are selling again.’”

“I think both the real estate market has picked up, and somewhat slowly, the business end of it is picking up as well. None of it is terribly surprising, but it has been a long dry spell,” he continued.



View Honey Creek Development ([https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?](https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msa=0&msid=208750189308497095519.0004e4012e61f75ad5b46&hl=en&ie=UTF8&t=h&ll=42.289247,-83.849115&spn=0.030477,0.054932&z=14&source=embed)

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