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Warren County project part of area's new urbanism resurgence

Union Village models other communities around the country where homes are built around town centers.

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By [Lawrence Budd](#) - Staff Writer

TURTLECREEK TWP., WARREN COUNTY —

The designers of Union Village plan to recreate a sense of community on farm fields covering more than 1,400 acres west of Lebanon.

The new urbanist design, approved last week in Warren County, endeavors to return residents and visitors to a time and place where neighbors exchange greetings while walking to church, shops and restaurants, medical or arts centers or parks. Businessmen hike from home to work in commercial spaces above and around homes, all organized around town centers.



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Union Village would straddle Ohio 741, south of Lebanon. This rendering depicts the town center from behind Marble Hall, one of [... Read More](#)

This vision has been realized in planned communities around the country, from Seaside, Fla., to Habersham, S.C., one of the places created by the developer of Union Village.

“It’s what all the great old towns were founded on,” said Bob Turner, hired by Otterbein Senior Lifestyle Choices to help turn the farm land, once inhabited by the Union Village Shakers, into a quaint, vibrant village of as many as 4,500 homes.



New urbanism

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The town center of Union Village would feature a square where residents and tourists could gather for events or a meal.

Seaside was created around 1980 by architect Andres Duany, a creator of new urbanism, on Florida’s Gulf Coast. It is now a sprawling

multigenerational development, so successful it has a neighboring new urbanist community, Watercolor.

Both are centered on downtowns where visitors and residents walk to shops and restaurants at the center of quaint, carefully designed communities set along narrow streets more amenable to walking than driving.

Otterbein, a non-profit known for retirement community development, hired Turner and other consultants, including architect Michael Watkins

after Tom Compton, chairman of the board at Otterbein, learned of and visited Habersham about a year ago. Watkins worked with Duany.



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A proposed development by Otterbein on 1,400 acres in Turtlecreek Twp. is expected to take shape over the next 25 years. ... [Read More](#)

“This was what they were thinking,” said Turner, who developed several islands off South Carolina before

starting Habersham, named for an early plantation owner and political leader. Turner and a partner formed a limited liability corporation, NU Developers, for the Otterbein project.

NU stands for new urbanism, which has seen a resurgence in Ohio, according to Martin Kim, director of regional planning for the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission.

While on its fourth decade nationally, new urbanism has gotten more attention recently in the Midwest since the economic downturn and hit taken by local economies driven by manufacturing and the automotive industry, Kim said. “People started to relook at the way we have been developing over the last several decades.”



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“A lot of the older parts of our cities, I think they were developed in such a way,”

Kim said, pointing to the

Oregon District in Dayton as

a good example. “It just made sense.” Lebanon’s historic downtown, a few miles east of Otterbein, was used in designing Union Village.

Newer examples of new urbanism include The Greene, the development off Interstate 675 in Greene County where shopping and restaurants share spaces with apartment dwellers built next to wide sidewalks along narrow streets leading to a downtown center.

“We need to focus on a human-scale development rather than an automobile-scale environment,” Kim said. “Everything is getting done digitally. But people need to interact.”



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Kettering and Riverside are studying whether to include new urbanist standards for sections of their cities, Kim said.

Cincinnati recently was recognized by the Congress of New Urbanism for adopting form-based standards, which encourage mixed use developments.

Still new urbanism has yet to take hold in the area.



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For example, plans for mixed development was abandoned within the Villages at Winding Creek and have yet to take shape in Soraya

Homes, another Design Homes development just south of the Montgomery-Warren County line in Clearcreek Twp.

“Soraya still has that dream,” said Jeff Palmer, director of planning and zoning for the township.

Union Village

Otterbein established its Union Village as a planned unit development through Warren County’s planning and zoning code. Otterbein next plans to establish a tax incremental financing district to finance the \$40 million, 250-acre first phase.

“You have to establish the there there,” Turner said.

Turner is also expected to identify the builders and other partners for the first phase- 60 to 100 homes or apartments and the first part of the town center, across Ohio 741 from the existing retirement community.

Premier Health Partners, the University of Dayton and Sinclair Community College were part of a charette held last year to develop the Union Village plan. The community is expected to take shape over 30 to 40 years.

Roundabouts are proposed on Ohio 741 to encourage motorists to slow down and simplify crossing from the retirement campus to Union Village.

At the county's request, Otterbein set aside 90 acres for a sports complex on land between a county and township park, establishing a strip that could be used by the Warren County Convention and Visitors Bureau to draw national youth tournaments and other sports events, as well as serve community needs.

"These projects are very different from conventional development," Turner said. "There's so much more diversity. It's so much more complicated. You're basically building a little town."

At Habersham, Turner said homebuyers came from the area and from across the country.

"Some of those people have started businesses, relocated businesses," Turner said, suggesting Union Village could complement development along the Interstate 75 corridor between Cincinnati and Dayton.

Joe and Deborah Yurasek of Turtlecreek Twp. visited Habersham in September and returned with descriptions of an old-fashioned downtown with shops within walking distance.

“It was different from these big houses that you see in the subdivisions around here,” Joe Yurasek said. “There was the feeling of greater potential for community.”

As they plan for retirement, the Yuraseks are looking for an age-friendly community and are drawn to the possibility of being able to walk to the performing arts center planned at Union Village.

“I hope that this strategic vision they have, they will be able to actualize it,” Yurasek said. “We like it here.”