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Greer land values cause developers to dig deep *Stormwater systems going underground*

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GREER -- Land is getting so pricey in Greer's central business district that developers are investing in expensive underground stormwater systems to make small lots work and to squeeze top dollar out of them.

A case in point is Hampton Centre on Wade Hampton Boulevard between Middleton Way and Fleming Drive that will put 18 office spaces and 19 retail spaces plus parking on 2.7 acres.

That is according to John Asher, senior partner with Lightning Developers and Sound Construction and Jason Garrett, senior project manager.

Garrett figures that even after spending \$250,000 on underground stormwater storage, plus another \$160,000 to re-do some previous work, the developers would still make money if they sold the property.

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An above-ground detention pond would have cost roughly \$20,000, he said.

J.D. Cantrell, a resident who lives behind the development, is happy the runoff will be stored underground rather than in a detention pond.

"I just don't think in this neighborhood here we need a pond," she said.

Jason Van Driesche, director of Upstate Forever's clean air and water program, said underground systems "don't gain you anything in terms of water quality or flood prevention as compared to the above-ground storage."

He said filters are available that can skim motor oil and grease from stormwater runoff and prevent the pollutants from getting into streams.

City engineer Wes Wagner said underground systems allow for "infill," using smaller lots closer in rather than sprawling to the outskirts.


He said Walgreens, SunTrust and Community South banks used underground systems for recent projects on Wade Hampton Boulevard.

Developers doing projects in the unincorporated areas of Greenville County haven't used this type of stormwater storage, but "both the county and developers are looking at this option where lot size is at a minimum," county spokesman Lee Polowczuk said.

At Hampton Centre, workers have installed corrugated plastic pipes, 6 feet in diameter, under parking areas, Asher said.

The runoff flows to an outlet structure, which is a large underground cement block box. From there it flows into an 8-foot-by-8-foot pre-existing tunnel under Wade Hampton.

A baffle prevents mud and debris from entering the tunnel, Garrett said.

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Garrett, who does projects throughout the Southeast, said underground storage is uncommon because it's expensive. He sees them as a better option than ponds, which could attract mosquitoes or be hazardous to children or even vehicles that run off the road.

Van Driesche said, "If you're working in a constrained space, it's a very useful stormwater management technique, and it's one that's been used for quite some time in other places where land became at a real premium earlier than it has here."

The systems require maintenance, just as detention ponds do, he said.
