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Cost may outpace many incomes in pedestrian-friendly developments
Price of neighborhood-centered homes often out of reach to first-time buyers, experts say

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Greenville residents know that mobility is key to getting the full use of county businesses and services because many homes were built in areas where you have to drive to almost everything.

While a new trend in homebuilding -- traditional neighborhood development (TND) -- is emerging in Greenville, new homebuyers will need a hefty bank account or line of credit to move into one of the amenity-filled subdivisions.

Most cost more than \$200,000.

The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau lists the County's median family income at \$41,149, which might make it difficult for many home shoppers to afford the mortgage.

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Blame it on the cost of developing land, said Caleb Freeman, president of Acadia Development Company, LLC, who said it would be difficult to market TND homes for less than \$200,000.

West Georgia Road's new Griffin Park development, with its plan for 1,600 homes, mixed uses and ample open space is marketed between \$200,000 and \$600,000.

"But that cost is nowhere near the cost of what it is down on the coast near Charleston," he said. "We still have a very good housing market in which we have housing available in all kinds of price ranges."

Grant Cunningham, an associate planning and landscape professor at Clemson University, said location is one of the determining factors in pricing the homes.

"But they tend not to locate these TNDs in neighborhoods where they are rehabilitating houses," he said. "They are in upscale locations where developers are trying to maximize the return on their investments."

Cunningham said that while the developments are good for creating open space and conserving land, they are only affordable to those whose incomes might be significantly more than the county's median.

"It's as if you're creating affordable housing for a certain class and that's what the issue boils down to," he said.

County Council Chairman Butch Kirven added that the price might be out of reach for many because of the cost of the materials used to build the houses.

But he also said that TNDs could be made more affordable if the public demands it from private developers.

"It takes creativity, but there's ways to do it and put an affordably priced home on the market at the same time," Kirven said.

Upstate Forever president Brad Wyche has called TNDs the wave of the future because the new home models bring neighbors together and encourages exercise because many businesses are within walking distance.

The communities are developed to target singles, young families, young couples, retirees and empty nesters.

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Wyche said that TNDs are a good fit for Greenville County, noting that Smart Growth America has ranked the Greenville-Spartanburg area fifth in the nation in sprawl -- right behind Atlanta.

Smart Growth America is a coalition of local, state and national organizations that work to improve the way land is used.

Freeman said that although TNDs are an efficient way to use land, the cost to develop them is higher because of the infrastructure that goes into building them.

Amenities and services include water, sewer, power, roads, sidewalks, trails and alleys, which are all critical in making a TND work as it was intended, he said.
