

Project brings 900 homes to Elmira

By Steve Kannon
OBSERVER STAFF

Elmira's north end is poised for a dramatic makeover as a new developer draws up plans for some 900 homes on what is now farmland fronting on Church Street West.

More than 170 acres of land will be transformed under the Lunor Group Inc. proposal for an integrated community development. Company president Sam Scicluna promises something unique to the town, using the characteristics of the land and providing eye-pleasing designs.

"Elmira has a chance to participate, from a planning standpoint, in a true community – it's a large enough parcel [with] one landowner that we can do something spectacular here."



The property, acquired earlier this year when Lunor bought the abutting Martin and Brubacher farms, extends back from Church Street east of Eldale Road, surrounding such places as ARC Industries, Eldale Veterinary Clinic and Elmira Farm Service.

Development will back onto and oversee the Elmira Golf Club, a tributary of the Canagagigue Creek and the Kissing Bridge Trail.

"What more could we have been blessed with on this site?" Scicluna asked.

Development is likely to get underway in 2008.

While Lunor is a new company, its principals are no stranger to Elmira. Scicluna runs Claysam Homes Ltd., currently building houses under the Penn's Way banner across the road from the Lunor site, at Church Street and Killdeer Drive. Partners Danny Finoro and brother Peter operate Finoro Homes, which owns the Bristow Creek property formerly developed by Hoflinger Holdings.

His company's experience in Elmira made Danny Finoro eager to pursue new opportunities in the community.

"We're very excited about this project. Obviously it's a long-term commitment here," he said, estimating 15 years as the minimum build-out time.

Based in Guelph, where the construction boom has seen rapid growth in residential development, Finoro said the pace in Woolwich is much slower, but Lunor is prepared for the staging set by the township.

That rate is perhaps reflective of the pace of life in Woolwich, one of the attractive features as homebuyers search for a place to build, added Scicluna.

Elmira is enjoying a building boom right now, and Lunor sees that carrying on for years to come. Four major subdivisions are already underway – Bristow Creek, Westfield Acres, Birdland Developments and the Elmira Raceway site. A fifth is slated for the corner of Church Street and Barnswallow Drive. That project includes a neighbourhood plaza.

"I think sales will ramp up for Elmira," predicted Shawn McGuire, Lunor's land development manager.

A planner by training, McGuire said the new proposal for the north side of Church Street would be unlike the others now underway.

Lunor is currently judging three full-scale designs submitted by three area planning firms – Green Scheels Pidgeon Planning Consultants, MHBC Planning Ltd., and Planning & Engineering Initiatives Ltd. A winning design is expected to be announced shortly.

"We're not going to standard grid, cookie-cutter thing because we're coming back to this master plan – we have space," he said. "This is a concept of a whole new community ... that gives us some more flexibility."

Rather than focus on the street frontage, the new project will see the spotlight on the back of the property, where it abuts the golf course and where the natural features of the land offer "the best vistas," McGuire added.

The project is expected to make an appearance at Woolwich council as early as this fall, when plans will be unveiled at a public meeting.

Director of engineering and planning Dave Gosnay said the land represents the key growth area for Elmira, encompassing much of the development for the medium-term. As such, planning staff has been providing input to Lunor, looking to keep the small-town feel – front-porch living, street-oriented construction – that's been stressed in recent developments.

"They've been very receptive to township input," he said of the developers.