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West Boca heats up with new development — with more than 1,900 new homes planned

Facing a hot housing market, West Boca is the latest South Florida community on the brink of seeing big growth: A luxury homebuilder has plans to replace swaths of farmland with more than 1,900 new homes.

The addition of [so many new residences](#) comes on the heels of the opening of the popular 13-acre Uptown Boca, a shopping destination that opened by Glades Road and State Road 441.

With more and more people across the country fleeing denser and colder states for South Florida, the housing market has struggled to keep up the significant demand. That need for housing, combined with the vast open farm land in West Boca, has created a perfect storm for developers looking to capitalize, said Ellen Winikoff, vice president of the West Boca Community Council, an organization that represents hundreds of homeowners associations across the region.

“At some point, the farmers who can’t farm there anymore because it’s not profitable or manageable for them are looking to sell their land and developers are able to purchase that,” Winikoff said. “Bit by bit, acre by acre, [farmers] have sold their property to survive and that’s their property and their right. It’s how it goes.”

GL Homes, a [developer that specializes in luxury homes](#) and 55-and-over communities, is in discussions to add a pair of new developments in West Boca. The first project would add than 1,250 homes north on farmland north of Clint Moore Road and west of State Road 7. There would be 1,000 homes included in the development, while an additional 250 would be allocated for workforce housing.

Additionally, the developer is planning to add 679 homes on Glades Road in between State Road 7 and Lyons Road, said GL Homes' Vice President of Development Kevin Ratterree. The development would be built on over 300 acres of farmland recently acquired by GL Homes.

"Everybody loves this place," Palm Beach County Commissioner Maria Sachs said. "The whole country is coming to Florida and everybody wants to move out here to be in Palm Beach County and I think that's great."

Prices for GL Homes' properties usually start in the mid-to-high six figures. Valencia Sound, a gated community in West Boynton, has home prices beginning at \$740,000, according to the GL Homes website. Lotus, a West Boca community north of Glades Road and east of Lyons Road, lists its homes between \$1.1 million and \$1.4 million, according to the same website.

Buying up land

With available land being relatively scarce in the eastern portion of Palm Beach County, West Boca has emerged an alluring option for developers due to the acres of untapped land and open spaces.

Sachs believes that has helped drive the interest, adding that West Boca also carries a certain cache because "the Boca address is always one that is sought for."



Palm Beach County is considering a proposal for GL Homes to build 1,250 new homes in West Boca on the land highlighted in red. (Courtesy: Palm Beach County)

"We have open spaces, and we don't have that in Broward anymore. You happen to fly over Broward County, you'll see there's not many open spaces in the western portion."

Uptown Boca has helped contribute to the area's attractiveness as it has quickly



BurgerFi at Uptown Boca in Boca Raton, Wednesday, March 17, 2021. (John McCall/South Florida Sun Sentinel)

emerged as a destination in West Boca. The complex comprises restaurants, bars, an outdoor store and 456 apartment units behind the shopping plaza.

Lazy Dog Restaurant & Bar, Bonefish Grill, Just Salad, BurgerFi, Chick-fil-A and Sloan's Ice Cream are among the stores that have opened, one by one, at the

\$200 million complex. On any given weekend night, the parking lot is full, with customers frequenting the many businesses there. An [Amazon Fresh supermarket](#) also could soon debut there.

Expecting more traffic

Among residents' biggest concerns is all the extra traffic coming to West Boca as a result of having new homes, said Sheri Scarborough, the president of the West Boca Community Council.

"Nobody wants more traffic anywhere, and West Boca is no different," Scarborough said.

Scarborough said the council has repeatedly met with GL Homes, as the homebuilder envisions adding 679 homes on farmland that was owned for decades by a local family. A big portion of that land is generally framed to the west by U.S. 441 and framed to the east by Lyons Road.

Some residents say the property, known as the Johns family land, shouldn't have an entrance built on its southern boundary near Glades Road, which is one of several entrances being considered, Scarborough said. Residents worry that creating that entrance near Glades Road would cause too much traffic for neighborhoods that are already there.

What more could Palm Beach County do to ease traffic?

“We’re being realistic,” Scarborough said. “We’re hoping the county will step up and get Lyons Road widened, which will help alleviate some of the traffic issues.”



A construction worker walks through lumber at Valencia Sound in Boynton Beach on May 24, 2021. The development is being overseen by GL Homes. (Amy Beth Bennett / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

No timeline has been finalized for building the the homes in West Boca.

Palm Beach County commissioners discussed the first proposal for 1,250 homes during a meeting in December and will revisit the issue next year. The commission would need to approve the project before homes could rise.

If approved, the houses would be built on a portion of the Agricultural Reserve, a 21,000-acre farming region in western Palm Beach County. The Agricultural Reserve has been a subject of fierce debate over land-preservation issues between developers and environmentalists.

Developers see the farmland as [prime real estate to build more houses](#), but environmentalists worry the county has gradually allowed developers to chip away at the land, which they fear will lead to overdevelopment.

The proposal for 679 homes between Lyons Road and State Road 7 has not yet come before the commission.

Looking ahead

There has been a silver lining from all the additions: The Uptown Boca center has offered residents a greater selection of stores and restaurants, and Scarborough suspects that Uptown Boca’s opening has led other nearby shopping centers to try to stay competitive.

“It has certainly spurred the other shopping centers to clean up and update their centers,” she said.

As for the traffic from Uptown Boca, she figures the shoppers “already on the road pulling into Uptown” would’ve otherwise kept going farther east on Glades Road to visit another entertainment venue or store.

“We’re happy that our residents have something local to go to,” she said.

“We’re happy the way that Uptown turned out, for sure.”