



Finding the MPC Sweet Spot

There are a multitude of techniques and offerings that can help master-planned communities flourish

By Don Neff



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Size matters in master-planned communities (MPCs) and the sweet spot is being neither too small nor too large. Smaller MPCs provide residents with the feel of living in a self-contained town but often cannot offer the same rich collection of amenities and social activities. MPCs too large can be overwhelming, leaving its residents feeling disconnected. The most successful MPCs are themed with an abundance of recreational amenities, including parks, pools, gardens, sports courts, entry-gated security and high-speed internet. Many will offer both passive and actively organized recreational activities such as sports lessons in pickleball and bocce ball, or culinary classes, artists in residence and book clubs. Some communities are age restricted to 55+ for at least one member of the household and no residents less than 18 years of age. Few MPCs are income generating, or self-sustaining without support of monthly or quarterly HOA dues, which vary with the amenity packages offered.

One example is The Ocala Preserve, in Ocala, Florida originally created by Shea Homes, then evolved with new builders introduced for a variety of product sizes, designs and price ranges. Amenities include the standard design elements of golf, tennis, pickleball, bocce ball and cycling. Separate pools are available for lap swimming, zero entry resort style while the jacuzzi is immensely popular. The pool bar is a huge draw for locals and guests to relax and converse. Its par-three golf course can be played in two directions offering both recreational and tournament style experiences for residents. The clubhouse with its “Salted Brick” restaurant, wine club storage and freshwater lake makes up the centerpiece of the community, surrounded by golf fairways and cycling trails for exploration. The lake also has a dock and boathouse with rentable equipment for kayaking and canoeing, as well as an outdoor kitchen.

A new type of MPC is the World Equestrian Center (WEC), a 10-minute drive from the Ocala Preserve. This

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has a different business model, with the prospect of being revenue generating and a self-supporting destination resort. WEC is the largest equestrian complex in the United States, consisting of 380 acres, with multi-indoor and outdoor arenas for show jumping, dressage and drawing over 25,000 equestrian enthusiasts during the peak season from around North America and Europe. Its residential estate component is currently under development and complementary to the main equestrian activity centers. The 5-Star Equestrian Hotel, designed in a classic French Country style offers 248 stately rooms and suites. The University of Florida (UF Health) Veterinary Center Complex is also on site for large and small animal health maintenance. This also includes UF Health Orthopedics and Sports Medicine, as well as walk-in services for minor illnesses and urgent care needs. There is a secondary Riding Academy Hotel consisting of studios and suites with small kitchens for visiting equestrians who wish to stay longer.

Well-designed MPCs in Southern California also offer other elements blending unique designs with nature. At the Rancho Mission Viejo HOA in South Orange County, Esencia is the essence of a California MPC, being family oriented and integrating a wide range of housing of all types—single family, townhome and multi-family rentals offering a well thought out palette of designs and price points. In addition to the tennis and swimming found at the North and South Plunge, Esencia also offers an extensive ball field sports complex for leagues as well as unique farming experiences and orchards where residents can pick seasonal citrus fruits at peak flavor maturity. Esencia also boasts a flying fishing pond to practice fly casting. A Montessori and elementary school are also found in the community and Ideal for young families. The design layout of the transportation network includes E-cart trails for non-motor-



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ized connections to navigate between the residential neighborhoods and rotary intersections for smooth and continuous traffic flow. A collection of hilltop buildings offering creative public places and private spaces allow for neighborly interactions. With the advent and acceptance of remote work patterns, Esencia offers a balance between working from home and commuting to a traditional office environment nearby.

The best MPC designs integrate healthy lifestyle choices providing rich social interactions. They are limited only by the imagination of their developers and associated team members of planners, architects and engineers. What shall we create next? **BSI**