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Reynoldsburg seeing gains after taking charge of development

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Two redevelopment projects are coming to downtown Reynoldsburg thanks to its strategy for a city-wide renewal. The city is also getting its first new housing subdivision in two decades, officials said during a Columbus Metropolitan Club forum on Wednesday.

Reynoldsburg is buying two parcels of land at 7221 and 7332 E. Main St. to spur the redevelopment of the sites into mixed-use buildings. They currently house a former PNC Bank branch and the Happy Dragon Chinese Restaurant.

"We're sort of taking the bull by the horns and purchasing both properties. We don't want to see them become just another bank branch," said [Andrew Bowsher](#), the city's director of development.

The city paid \$2 million for the 1.6-acre branch site. Working with its preferred developer, Trivium Development, it will raze the building to make way for a 45,000- to 60,000-square-foot project that could host medical tenants, office users or an incubator space for startup businesses, Bowsher said. The space benefits from connections to the community center and the city's historic downtown. There is also a 218-space, three level parking garage



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A restaurant site at 7332 E. Main St. will be converted to a two- to three-story mixed-use building with restaurant and retail space on the ground level and some office space above it.

along Davidson Drive nearby. The project is expected to cost \$20 million to \$30 million, Bowsher said.

The 0.9-acre Happy Dragon site was bought for \$625,000 and will be converted to a two- or three-story mixed-use building with restaurant and retail spaces at ground level and some office space above it. The 17,000-square-foot project would cost around \$10 million to \$15 million, Bowsher said.

OHM Advisors is the designer for the two projects, which are a few hundred feet away from one another. Construction could begin late this year or early next.

Reynoldsburg scored another victory recently when a shuttered Kmart site was purchased by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The organization is moving its headquarters from Colorado to anchor a mixed-use development Bowsher and others likened to a "mini-Grandview Yard."

At the Columbus Metropolitan Club forum, Bowsher and Mayor Joe Begeny laid out the case for why the city was taking a new approach to development. Those efforts included rewriting the city's zoning code in 2018 to cut red tape and make development quicker and cheaper. Now, only one planning commission meeting is required for new development, instead of the "long, drawn out process" it can be in other cities, Bowsher said.

"Actually, we cut down a lot of our timelines, what I like to call cutting through the red tape and getting rid of the bureaucratic mess that didn't necessarily need to be there," he told the CMC audience. "When you're over-regulating things, you're just costing more money to those small businesses for them to get up and started, or development costs that sometimes 25% is just them trying to get something to the table to get something approved. And that's really a backwards way of thinking, especially when we're in a housing crisis currently right now, and we can't keep up with the demand."

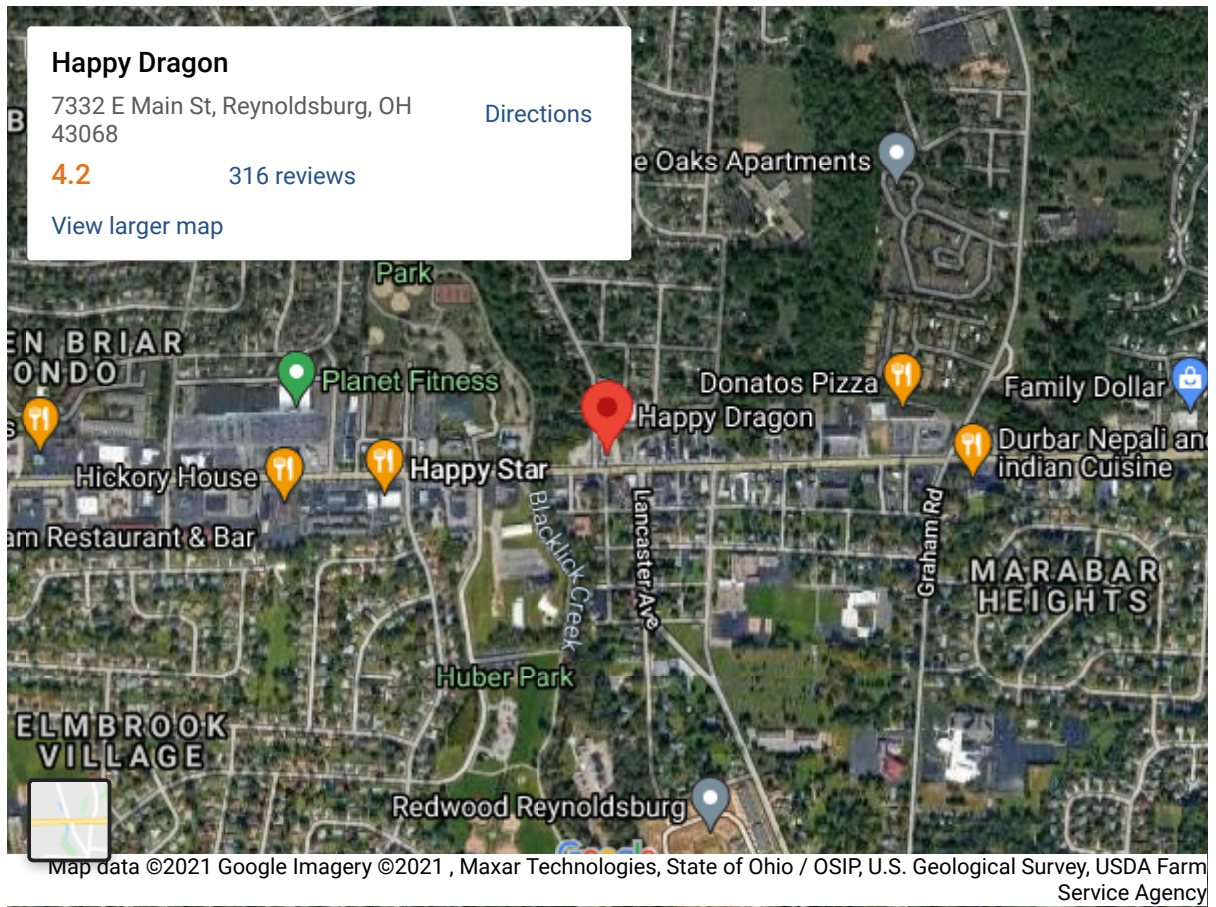
There had been virtually no new housing development in the city before the zoning code change, Bowsher said, but now M/I Homes Inc. has been approved for a 354-home development, the first new

subdivision in Reynoldsburg in 20 years. And the Kmart site promises more rental units.

"We really couldn't do a lot (of development) – there was a lot of red tape and a lot of pushback," he said. "And I think that people break down housing into owner-occupied and rental-occupied, and people that are renting or living in apartments are just bad people. And it's just not true. The younger generations and even the empty nesters are living differently than what their fathers and mothers did before them. So you have to meet the facts and the challenges head on to understand that those types of housing are a product that is in high demand. We certainly need to make sure that we're building that."

Bowsher said the city has taken cues from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's [Insight 2050](#) study that anticipates continued growth of Central Ohio with another 1 million people living here by 2050. Diversity of housing and accessible price points are a high priority, Begeny said.

"I think housing is definitely a challenge," Begeny said. "There's a housing crisis in general in Central Ohio, affordable housing included. And Reynoldsburg has not had a lot of development in that area over a number of years."



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