

# Ritzy Edinburg suburb in the works

## DEVELOPMENT TO RESEMBLE SHARYLAND PLANTATION

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EDINBURG — Move over, Sharyland Plantation: A local-farming family is planning their own superdevelopment that could include 1,700 homes, apartments as well as parks, an elementary school and a Catholic high school.

The Burns family, who owns more than 10,000 acres of farmland in the Upper Rio Grande Valley, has their eyes on building a new 800-acre residential and commercial project called La Sienna. In the next seven years, it could add about 4,500 people to the growing city, which has boosted its population by about 14,000 since 2000 and surpassed Harlingen to become the thirdlargest Valley city.

“This would be the largest development in the Upper Valley outside of the (Sharyland Plantation),” said Adrian Arriaga, a Realtor for the project.

The Burns family is even using the same planners for the site used at Sharyland Plantation, TBG Partners of Austin, to design walking trails and four-lane boulevards.

Owners are planning the proposed development, a total of 1.25 square miles, on land on the northeast corner of Expressway 281 and Monte Cristo Road in Edinburg, just north of the new Flying J travel center. The 150 acres of retail space would be enough for several grocery and big box stores, said Todd Gilliland of SKC Development in Edinburg.

Local officials are welcoming the potential development of the east part of the city that is mostly rural or vacant land dotted with a few smaller housing subdivisions.

“I think what it will mean to Edinburg is more people moving here and increasing our tax base,” said Ramiro Garza, director of the Edinburg Economic Development Corporation, the city’s job creation arm. “And more importantly, it will make a spark for other development.”

The land had been used to grow onions, potatoes and wheat, said Kent Burns, who is developing the project along with his brothers Sandy and Chris. But he said logistical issues have made it more difficult to farm the area and he thinks the best investment would be development.

Land for a new Catholic high school has already been donated to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, a total of about 54 acres which could create the third Catholic secondary school in the Rio Grande Valley.

The diocese has been looking for a land donation for months to build a new high school, but any new school would need to be built by the church.

Local church officials weren’t available Monday for comment.

Burns, who is not Catholic, said he hopes the high school would help attract buyers. The owners also hope to donate to the city for a fire station and a library and possibly more land to the school district for an elementary school.

Walking trails and private recreation centers are also planned.

Several home builders would probably build houses in the development and the

houses themselves will probably cost \$140,000 and up on land ranging from one-fifth to a half acre, Burns said.

While much of the project is still to be determined, the first phase of the project will start in a few weeks with construction of roads and other infrastructure, he said.

Construction of the first phase of 95 homes could start as early as January and about 700 homes could be completed within the next four years. The other 700 homes would come before 2013.

Developers say they have already had discussions with grocery stores, like H.E.B., and big-box stores, like Wal-Mart and The Home Depot, to occupy the space along Expressway 281 and Monte Cristo Road.

Burns, a McAllen resident whose family owns much of the land a few miles north of the La Sienna development, said it could be possible to develop more property into housing or commercial space. However, they don't have any immediate plans.

"This is a learning curve," Burns said. "Once we've completed this, we'll look at other projects."

———Kyle Arnold covers business, the economy and general assignments for The Monitor. You can reach him at (956) 683-4410. For this and more on local stories, visit

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#### Site and plans for new Edinburg development

