

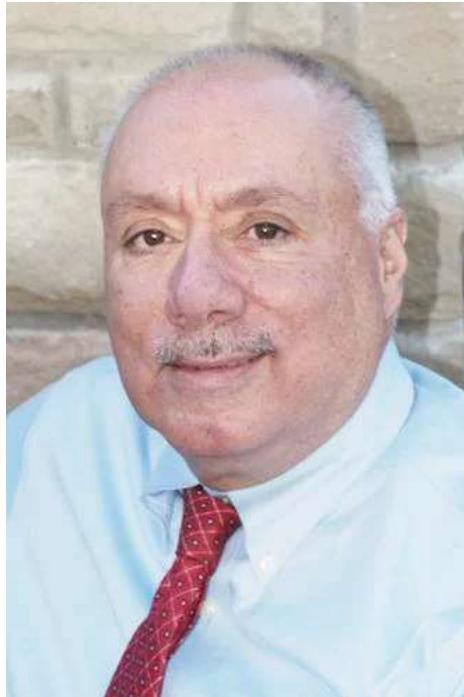


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## Nolensville: A growing community

By Len Serafino • Columnist

Feb 27, 2025



Len Serafino

When I moved to Nolensville in December 2012, Nolensville was still a small town with 6,200 residents. The Realtor told me we would have a major grocery store and a drug store within three short years. That didn't happen. Some longtime residents, like Frank Wilson, can remember when the town was even smaller, a truly rural outpost on the edge of Williamson County.

Wilson, who moved to Nolensville from College Grove 72 years ago, remembers when there were about 300 families living in the town. Having been appointed the postmaster for the town, in 1960, he should know.

"There were five grocery stores, all locally owned," Wilson said. "We had a service station, a funeral home, a sandwich shop and an elementary school. We were a small farming community, with 14 milk dairies at the time."

Wilson and his wife, Peggy, still have six head of cattle on their property. He looks back fondly to a time when the town had very little traffic.

Times have really changed in Nolensville. The current population is around 17,000 and residential projects already on the books will add nearly 7,000 people over the next several years. The town's growth attracted the attention of several commercial land developers who are currently in the process of building exciting new developments south of the town's well-

known historic district. Currently, there are three commercial developments underway, two of them mixed use. Full disclosure, I serve on the town's planning commission and favored these developments.

The Watkins Real Estate Group is building a commercial entity anchored by a brand new Publix on Nolensville and Rocky Fork Road, called Village Green, that will include 42,000 feet of retail and restaurant space. Publix is expected to open in the fall of this year.

According to Robbie Swan, Watkins vice president of development, a number of leases have already been signed by companies such as Jersey Mike's, Club Pilates, and First Watch, a full service restaurant, to name a few.

Swan pointed out, "We are seeking high quality retail tenants who will be here for many years and provide a local presence."

On the other side of Nolensville Road, across from Village Green, Land Innovations, led by David Horwath, the firm's president, has started construction on Nolensville Town Square. "We dared to dream about what Nolensville's future could be. One thing the town was missing was a central gathering place to enjoy moments of celebration not available in the past," Horwath said.

Over a half-acre of land will be dedicated to the square, which will include a fountain that children can play in plus space to stage concerts and movie nights.

The development, done in partnership with Rochford Realty and Construction, is a mixed-use project. It will include retail, office space, restaurants and 404 residential townhomes and condominiums. "I don't know of another jurisdiction in Middle Tennessee that has a Kroger, a Publix and town square, all within a 10-minute walk," Horwath said. "In my opinion, experts will study this."

Darcey, the third development, will host a Kroger store, including a gas station. Another mixed-use site, it will contain retail, restaurants, offices and 211 residences, including 199 rental units. Like the other projects, Darcey also has a significant amount of open space.

What do all these changes mean to this once sleepy town? Some would say "more traffic," which is never a welcome addition. But as Swan pointed out, "When new developments are proposed, worries about traffic come up in nearly every community. We do everything we can to mitigate the problem."

Nolensville's town manager, Victor Lay, concurs.

"One thing that developments like these come with are fees that go toward improving roads as we move forward," he said.

It's also true that the way developers are designing their projects involves a great deal of effort to ensure more walkability through extensive paths that are also bicycle friendly.

On the flip side, "Smart growth also draws good, solid retailers to a town," according to Lay. "People will want to visit, shop and live here. That kind of synergy can result in meaningful increases in sales tax revenues," he added. "Publix and Kroger alone could bring \$750,000 to a million dollars annually to Nolensville."

Horwath and Swan both see synergies. Swan believes there is synergy in the competition that various businesses will experience.

"It will bring out the best in these businesses as they compete to attract customers." Horwath agrees: "For example, Kroger brings big box, which will tie in nicely to the residential aspects of our community. All of us will work to ensure convenient road and trail connections too. We expect to attract higher quality tenants."

While some residents might prefer the old days, when Nolensville was a quiet rural community where people seemed to know everyone, growth itself doesn't eliminate being neighborly. Being willing to lend a helping hand is still a community priority for Nolensville residents. There are countless examples documented on both social media and quietly felt in the hearts of those who live here. It is part of the town's DNA.

Perhaps Frank Wilson, who has seen the town's growth for many years, put it best: "New development suits me fine. We need commercial development here to make the town work like it's supposed to work."



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