

What was to be upscale Amity neighborhood sits unkempt, unpaved and unfinished

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By Kevin Duffy
Reading Eagle

When work at the Pond View housing development in Amity Township came to a sudden halt in 2007, resident Mike Bishop was left with an unfinished driveway and a view of vacant, overgrown lots.



Nearly four years later, conditions in the upscale development off Route 662 and Pine Lane haven't changed all that much.

Bishop and his wife, Cyndie, live on a cul-de-sac in the development of seven homes, some of which sold for more than \$500,000. The trouble the Bishops and other residents now have has to do with an unfinished street and nine lots that remain undeveloped.

On one side of the Bishops' home a vacant site is overgrown with weeds, as is the empty lot directly across from them.

Down the street, an enormous mound of dirt fill from an unfinished lot stands half as high as the house beside it, overgrown with small trees and more weeds.

"It's an eyesore," Bishop said of the mound.

The Bishops bought their home from Commonwealth New Homes, a Montgomery County developer that went bankrupt in September 2007. Work in Pond View had stopped months earlier, and the Bishops ended up with a driveway that looks much like the road in the development - craggy and in need of a final coat of blacktop.



Reading Eagle: Jameson Sempey
Overgrowth, a weedy dirt mound and vacant lots flank a high-end home, which sits on a street still lacking its final layer of pavement at the Pond View development in Amity Township.

"We paid for a finished driveway and never got it," Mike Bishop said.

Making matters worse, subcontractors who hadn't been paid by Commonwealth put a lien on the couple's home.

Hamburg resident Paul F. Stitzel, who bought Pond View early in 2008, shares the frustration felt by the Bishops and other homeowners.

Stitzel said he bought three unsold homes and nine undeveloped lots from Bancorp Bank, which had acquired the remaining unsold lots at a Berks County sheriff's sale.

The homes and the lots remain unsold.

"Nothing has sold and I'm losing money," Stitzel said. "After I bought, the economy sank down to the bottom."

Commonwealth also was the developer of Glenwood Estates, another upscale community off Moriatton Road in Amity, less than two miles from Pond View. Homeowners there experienced similar pains to those in Pond View, but Amity Township Manager Charles E. Lyon said the current situation in Glenwood is better.

"Pond View has taken a little longer," Lyon said.

Stitzel said he is currently weighing offers from four different real estate companies interested in selling properties in Pond View.

He said he also has received offers on five lots from potential buyers, but he called the amounts they were willing to pay "ridiculous."

Still, he is optimistic that the economy is slowly righting itself.

"It seems to be getting better," he said.

Stitzel is responsible for road maintenance in Pond View, but he feels he shouldn't have to be after paying Amity Township \$56,000 in March to help replenish an escrow account that had been locked in litigation due to Commonwealth's bankruptcy. Stitzel was not involved in the litigation against Bancorp Bank, and put the money in as a good will gesture to cover future road work, township Solicitor Brian Boland said.

The road in Pond View still doesn't have the final layer of paving, Lyon said, adding that the township won't be accepting responsibility for the road until it does. He said Stitzel also is required to mow the unsold lots.

"Until the roads are offered to us, we don't maintain them," Lyon said.

Brenda O'Brien, who lives down the street from the Bishops with her husband, Kelly, said properties might sell if Stitzel finished the road and kept the lots mowed.

"I just want the place cleared up," she said.

It would be foolish to finish the road before development is finished, Stitzel said, explaining that construction equipment would ruin the road surface.

The O'Briens bought their home in February 2008 from the original owner, who had purchased it from Commonwealth. O'Brien said she doesn't regret the decision.

"It's private, and it has great potential," she said of the development.

But like the Bishops, O'Brien would like to see the enormous fill pile removed from the lot across from her property.

"I would love for it to go away," she said.

Contact Kevin Duffy: 610-371-5016 or kduffy@readingeagle.com.

