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A vital event: A 300-unit apartment complex breaks ground in Springbrook Farm

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The word "vital" got tossed around a few times on Thursday morning like the dirt county leaders and developers threw forward.

A 300-unit apartment complex named "Vital at Springbrook Farm" broke ground across from the new Fairfield Inn & Suites between Alcoa Highway and Tesla Boulevard.

Sarah Harris of Bluedog Capital Partners, a real estate investment group, said once completed, the property will feature a clubhouse, fitness center, pool, summer kitchen, outdoor kitchen and social spaces. Harris added that the buildings will offer studios, 1 and 2 bedroom units that allow pets, and apartments will have large kitchens, patios and personal office spaces.

Situated in the heart of Springbrook Farm, she said residents will be within walking distance to bike trails, a distillery, restaurants and other shops.

Blount County Mayor Ed Mitchell said the view from the groundbreaking site is one of the best in the county. Developers have said the design may imitate a modern barn or farmhouse to match the surrounding landscape.

In partnership with Bluedog, Joseph Welden of StoneRiver, a real estate investment, development and management group that focuses on multi-family residences, said Vital is the second project in Alcoa of which StoneRiver has been a part.

"It's my privilege today to welcome all of you to this extremely 'Vital' event," Alcoa City Manager Mark Johnson said. "I wondered about the name of that, and it actually works really well for this event and Springbrook Farm. It's vital to getting kicked off properly."

Like the first home in a subdivision, Johnson said other developments are falling into place and more are to come.

Vital is the forth development to start construction in the future town center where the ALCOA Inc. West Plant was formerly located.

The new, larger Texas Roadhouse, across Hall Road from where the restaurant currently operates, has a frame and foundation. A new Food City that neighbors Vital broke ground several weeks ago, and Fairfield across the street is built and open for business.

"As Alcoa goes, so goes Blount County," Mayor Mitchell said. "We don't ever want to forget that. What makes all of this work is all of us working together and having the same goals and the same objectives."

Mitchell said the city of Alcoa's vision for the area will complement the entire region. Although it has taken decades, Mitchell said speed and doing things right don't always go hand-in-hand.

Springbrook Farm, he said, was done right.

Development in Springbrook Farm has dominated agendas for Alcoa Board of Commissioners and the planning commission in recent years. Shovel by shovel, the master plan is materializing from concept and site plans to brick and mortar money-makers.

"I remember when Mark (Johnson) was first talking about [Springbrook Farm] back when he first became city manager," Mitchell said. "It was a windy day like this, and he was having trouble keeping his bangs out of his eyes. That's how long it's been."

Johnson, whose head reflected the morning sun on Thursday, said shortly after he was hired as city manager for Alcoa in 1999, redeveloping the more than 300 acres of the former plant site became one of his first projects.

"Twenty-two and a half years later, and who says government doesn't work at lightning speed?" Johnson said.

To cap off the ceremony, Jeff Arnett from Company Distilling presented a toast and offered the crowd morning bourbon shots, a little stronger than espresso.

Company Distilling will be building a large headquarters and manufacturing facility in Springbrook Farm.

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