

REAL ESTATE

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The Press-Register has an average of **551** homes for sale listed every Sunday.

* January through June 2006 average

PRESS-REGISTER

Kathy Jumper/Real Estate Editor

E-mail: kjumper@press-register.com Phone: 219-5979



More auctions predicted

National trend gaining locally as agencies look to reduce listings

By **KATHY JUMPER**
Real Estate Editor

Robbie Jaeger's client had looked at the eight-bedroom Gulf-front house in Gulf Shores last summer when it was listed for \$2.9 million. When the 5,300-square-foot house hit the auction block earlier this month, Jaeger's customer traveled from Missouri to bid — and won it for \$1.65 million.

"He's going to furnish it and put it on the rental market," said Jaeger, of Meyer Real Estate in Gulf Shores. He and a colleague, Eric Nelson, received a 3 percent commission for bringing the buyer to the table, Jaeger said.

Auction companies were booked in Florida this year, and auctioneers expect the trend to hit Alabama's Gulf Coast next year. With 2,788 condominium units for sale at the Gulf, auctions will get the sales activity moving, according to the firms, and some area real estate agencies are looking at auctions as a way to reduce their listings.

Auctions are up nationally, according to the National Auctioneers Association in Overland, Kan. Industry revenue totaled \$257.2 bil-

lion in 2006 and is projected to hit \$269.6 billion in 2007, according to NAA.

Residential real estate is the fastest-growing segment of the live auc-

"I think we'll see 18 months of more auctions — 2009 will be the barn burner."

— Jason Haynes, Coastal Auction Co.

tion industry, increasing by 12.5 percent in 2006 and generating \$16 billion. Residential revenue had

increased by 3.1 percent at the end of the second quarter of this year.

"I think we'll see 18 months of more auctions — 2009 will be the barn burner," said Jason Haynes of

Coastal Auction Co. "So many people in south Baldwin County gasp when they hear the word auction. But you've got to find the bottom (of the market) before you can come up. You will never know it unless you get a lot of this stuff moving."

Local real estate investor Joe Cook plans to offer 210 acres on Baldwin County 91 and Sunset Drive in Lillian for sale at auction on Dec. 4, with 78 of those acres to be auctioned "absolute," or with no minimum bid, according to The National Auction Group in Gadsden. A buyfront residential lot on Fort Morgan Road owned by Cook will also be offered

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SPRING HILL REVITALIZATION MASTER PLAN



Left: Megan McLaughlin of town planners Dover, Kohl & Partners, based in Coral Gables, Fla., gathers maps and aerial photos of the Spring Hill area at the headquarters of the Village of Spring Hill's restoration effort Thursday in Mobile. The nonprofit group of volunteers brought in the urban planning firm to help residents design a master plan to revitalize the community. The group wants to bring back the charm of the historic area, as well as more businesses.

Below: James Dougherty, left, and Andrew Georgiadis of Dover, Kohl & Partners demonstrate how they map right-of-way features on Old Shell Road to create maps for the revitalization project.

Photos by **MIKE KITRELL**/Staff Photographer

Design results to be unveiled

By **KATHY JUMPER**
Real Estate Editor

Spring Hill may be a diamond in the rough, but it's still a diamond, according to urban planner Victor Dover.

Dover, Kohl & Partners of Coral Gables, Fla. spent the past week in Spring Hill, working with residents to design a master plan to restore the historic community. The town planners were hired by the nonprofit group, The Village of Spring Hill.

On Tuesday, the results of the public design process will be presented to the community. Mayor Sam Jones and city officials at 6 p.m. at St. Paul's Episcopal

School auditorium off Old Shell Road.

Dover Kohl set up shop — complete with computers, an economist and a traffic expert — in a vacant storefront on Old Shell

Road. Residents were encouraged to drop in to offer ideas and view the work while it was in progress. On Thursday evening, more than 150 residents participated in a hands-on design exercise.

"We've spent the past couple of months studying the area and its historic past," said Margaret Flippen, a project director for Dover Kohl. "We've been measuring streets and sidewalks and



Press-Register graphic



looking at the designs that make the area special."

Dover Kohl was asked to focus on three key intersections or roadways: Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, Bit 'n' Spur and Old Shell roads, and McGregor Avenue be-

tween Museum Drive and Spring Hill Avenue, according to Linda St. John, president of The Village of Spring Hill, which was formed in March 2006 to spearhead

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WHAT: Master plan work-in-progress for Spring Hill

WHO: Urban planners Dover, Kohl & Partners

WHEN: Tuesday, 6 p.m., St. Paul's Episcopal School auditorium, Old Shell Road

INFO: Contact: www.thevillageofspringhill.com

Design results to be revealed for Spring Hill

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improvements to the area. One of the goals was to bring businesses back into the area to fill the numerous vacant store spaces.

Those three areas are ripe for change, but not so far gone that improvements can't be made, Dover said. In fact, he said he and his staff have "yet to hear of an insurmountable obstacle" to revive the area.

"Usually the hardest thing is to get the community to agree on how they want to meet the needs of the motorist and the pedestrian," Dover said. "Right now it's 90 percent in favor of the motorist. We'll ask the question, 'Is the community ready to tip the balance in favor of the pedestrians and the business addresses and livability?'"

He used downtown Fairhope as an example of a city that has slowed traffic on its Main Street area to allow for safe walkability among shops and restaurants.

Spring Hill's "main street" area is considered to be the stretch of Old Shell Road from Spring Hill College to the area around the existing Holiday clothing store, according to Dover.

Regional and national retailers have specific parking, visibility and signage requirements when looking at store locations, according to Don Kelly of The Mitchell Company, which developed the retail center, Legacy Village at Spring Hill off Du Rhu Drive.

"Having the college there, nice churches, the library and businesses like Carpe Diem (Coffee & Tea Co.) provides a good basis for bringing in additional local business," Kelly said. "It may take awhile to happen, but I see what they are doing as very positive."

People go to downtown Fairhope not for its parking, but for "its sense of place," Dover said. "It's not near an interstate, there's no visibility for stores and it has limited appeal to national tenants who push general goods. Instead, a creative group of entrepreneurs — with one-of-a-kind, neighborhood-oriented stores — have taken root."

The city plans to coordinate Spring Hill's revitalization efforts with the city's future master plan, according to Gina Gregory, the City Council member representing the area.

"It's a great idea to start looking at what we can achieve," she said. "They don't have to be dreams, they can be a reality with the cooperation of the city."

The Village of Spring Hill has raised more than \$1 million in grant funding and other donations, according to St. John. Grant money will pay for sidewalks and the urban planners, and Gregory has set aside capital improvement money for intersection upgrades and more traffic lights.

Dover said he likes working with a community group more than a developer.

"The plan led by a community is the one that sustains," he said. "They don't like to take no for an answer."