



Builders, developers discuss population increase

By Alena Parker
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Developers, builders and real estate professionals pushed chairs into a circle Monday morning to discuss preparing for the new brigade coming to Fort Stewart.

Allen Brown, local broker for Century 21, organized the meeting after hearing different estimates of what is coming and what is needed.

"We just all need to have a consensus of what the impact is," Brown said. "Probably the most important question is when."

October 2010 is the "e-date of the new brigade," according to Mike Biering, deputy garrison commander, with about 2,400 troops coming in that month alone.

"That October 2010 means those soldiers are on the ground and training," Biering said, adding some families will be here months earlier looking for homes.

The group learned there will be about 390 new soldiers and their families in between next April and October.

No one else comes for the next six months, according to Biering's timeline, then another 1,000 soldiers arrive in spurts through October 2011.

"The worse thing we can do is either overbuild or

Increase

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underbuild any particular market," Hinesville City Manager Billy Edwards said.

Newcomers are not bound to find homes within the county, but the group wants Liberty to be the first choice.

"We are definitely proponents of having our soldiers and families living in the local community, as much as possible," Biering said.

Making the county more attractive to homebuyers sparked discussion.

Though Liberty provides the shortest commute to post, there is competition with surrounding areas, namely Glennville and Savannah, with Richmond Hill, "chief among them," according to Clay Sikes.

"If we could provide the quality housing in the inner-core of the city, close to post...we feel like there's a great possibility that those numbers that have drifted away from us may drift back to us," Sikes said.

Calling himself the "senior statesman," with 36 years of local experience, Sikes said housing issues from the 1970s build-up when a division was stationed on Fort Stewart needed to be considered.

"Those (buildings) are now approaching 30 to 35 years old," Sikes said.

He said many of them would need so much remodeling that new homes could be in the same price range. With homes sold and resold "some six, seven or eight or nine times," Sikes said the trend has been for homes at that age to having to go through a "complete renewing," in order to compete in the market.

"That's become more obvious to me in last six to 12 months than ever before," Brown agreed. "Because people can buy the new construction, get that new carpet, that new paint. So it's tough right now for those [sellers]."

Biering estimates a 2,000-person civilian workforce will be attached with the new brigade.

"You have to look at the packages, holistically," Friends of Liberty Director Paul Andresak said, bringing up education and healthcare. "The soldiers are going to be looking at everything that goes along with it."

While exact numbers are still uncertain, Biering said there are guides.

"If you take the 5th brigade, only, and use that as a short-term yardstick...you pretty much can't go wrong," he said.

He estimates about a 25 percent increase for the community to absorb.