

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

A CRAIN FAMILY BRAND

Home > Real Estate

May 22, 2025 05:50 AM

Middleburg Heights unlocks the secret to a development boom

DAN SHINGLER 



Pride One's \$50 million mixed-use development planned for Middleburg Heights.

City of Middleburg Heights

Middleburg Heights, an established suburb of about 16,000 around 10 miles southwest of Cleveland, has found the secrets to spurring new developments that's setting it apart.

Long known for its Southland shopping area, closures of major retailers such as Sears and Burlington Coat Factory have left big holes in the city's commercial real estate fabric. But city leadership is beginning to fill those gaps in transformative ways.

"I think people are recognizing there's a different dynamic since Mayor (Matthew) Castelli took over in 2019," said Charles Bichara, the city's economic development director. "If you're not improving, you're falling behind."

The Sears auto center, closed in 2017, recently was razed, and the main building (6950 W 130th St), with 320,000 square feet of space between its first floor and basement, soon will be torn down.

Bichara said a Meijer supercenter, including a garden center and gas station, will replace it.

The Burlington property is also being demolished, and the seven-acre site is being sold to developer Pride One for a \$50 million mixed-use development. Pride One President Tim Courtad said initial plans include 170 new luxury apartments (190,000 square feet) and 14,000 square feet of restaurant, bars, and retail.

"It's going to be a dynamite site," said Courtad, who also envisions an outdoor plaza with walking paths connecting to nearby trails.

Elsewhere, an 81-room Tru Hotel by Hilton on Rosbough Drive near I-71 is finishing construction after a pandemic-induced delay.

Five Star Auto Group's Honda Dealership (7700 Pearl Road) has shifted plans from renovations to a new 64,000-square-foot building. According to Bichara, it's slated to open in June with more than 100 employees.

Following the demolition of a former car dealership and 100,000-square-foot strip mall at West 130th Street and Pearl Road, the city worked with developers and businesses to construct six buildings that house 11 businesses. That including new freestanding buildings for Starbucks and McAlister's Deli alongside a new WetGo car wash for the Middleburg Heights Giant Eagle. Three additional new buildings on the abutting property house eight businesses including Chipotle, SVS Vision, AT&T, Citizens Bank, Health Express, Smoothie King, Potbelly and 30,000 square-foot Aldi, Bichara said.

This growth has come about, Bichara said, because of the city's willingness to work closely with developers and to proactively address its old properties to give other businesses the confidence to invest.

"It only works with a partnership," Courtad agreed. He credited Castelli for cooperating with Pride One on zoning and convincing the developer to move forward with the Burlington site purchase.

"He's really good at selling their vision and being hands-on and working with you," Courtad said.

Partnerships with the State of Ohio and Cuyahoga County also fueled the developments. The state's brownfield cash is funding the demolition of both the Sears (\$5.5 million) and Burlington sites, Castelli said.

The Sears building's deep basement makes that project particularly expensive, Bichara said. "It's 120,000 cubic yards of fill to fill that hole. ... It's going to require 9,000 truckloads of fill," he said.

The city purchased the site for \$1.8 million in 2023, used the state's brownfield grant project to cover all of the clean-up costs and found the needed fill-in dirt in nearby Parma.

A big key to the city's success with this project, Bichara said, was the city's ability — and willingness — to purchase and prepare the site itself. The site was vacant for years, but, he said, "Once we owned it, Meijer had an interest in the site."

The city has even made some money in the process, selling the Sears site to Meijer in 2024 for \$5.5 million. It also sold the Burlington site to Pride One for \$1.2 million after buying it for \$850,000. Both sales are now pending.

The city's proactive approach to development, its willingness to pursue state funding and clean up its brownfield sites, and a planning process that has included a new master plan and zoning for much of the city have made it a poster child for how other suburbs might spur development, say Cuyahoga County planners.

A pair of county planners helped the suburb develop its new master plan. Now, the county brings officials from other local governments to see how they can spur their own development, said Cuyahoga County Planning Manager Jim Sonnhalter.

Sonnhalter has been impressed by the city's work.

"They have a lot of development happening," he said. "We were just getting started on the master plan and were driving down to one meeting ... and there was already an entire site next to Fat Head's Brewing (17450 Engle Lake Drive) that was completely cleared for a new logistics company that was coming in."

County planners say the city's aggressive approach of enacting necessary zoning changes before it started work on the master plan helped the process.

"Usually, you start with the master plan update and that will come with recommendations on how to update your zoning," said County Senior Planner Rachel Novak. "We were in a really advantageous position where the city said, 'We just started updating the zoning code, so we're going to have a simultaneous effort.' That really saved a lot of time."

Novak added that Middleburg Heights' plan was a perfect fit with what the county has been promoting: walkable communities that mix residential and retail development, connected to local trails and other infrastructure to help create county-wide networks of recreational resources.

Bichara noted the developments have spurred other property owners to invest in their sites, just as the city hoped.

He said one example was Dairy Deli at Sheldon and Engle Roads, a "small, dilapidated building" that sits at a prominent intersection of the city's commercial district.

For years, the city had hoped the owner would improve the site. But it didn't happen until the owner saw the improvements being made around him. The city worked with him on necessary zoning changes so he could replace the existing store with a new building.

“(It was) right at the gateway of our community,” Bichara said. “He intended to do something for a number of years and finally decided to take the step now ... because he saw so much investment going on all around him.”

Editor's note: This story was amended at 9:55 a.m. May 22 to clarify and add information about developments near Pearl Road and W. 130th Street.