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Developer Mike Speas, who has proven there's a market for modest-sized, efficient houses in Port, is bringing that concept to Belgium's New Luxembourg project

Port Washington developer Mike Speas, who has made his mark on the city with redevelopment projects that include Old Theatre Square and Harbor Square, is about to work his magic in Belgium — this time replicating his innovative Terraces at Mineral Springs subdivision with a European flair.

Houses in the development along Division Street on Port's southeast side incorporate traditional design features found in the city with green technology, creating comfortable, energy-efficient homes.

Similar features will be incorporated into the New Luxembourg development, Speas said.



“They’ll be similar in that we’re doing small, extremely energy-efficient and detailed homes that reflect the heritage and culture of Luxembourg,” he said.

Speas said he’s been “really thrilled” with the acceptance the Port Washington homes have received.

“We’re going as fast as we can go,” he said. “I really like the way it’s looking. It’s starting to give a rhythm to the street.

“We thought we would probably sell one or two houses a year, and it’s probably going to end up being just that.”

There was one existing house in the subdivision that Speas, through his Timber Creek Development, renovated to reflect the neighborhood. He’s built two other homes in the subdivision and is currently constructing two houses — one is already sold and the other is a spec house.

Leading the small-home revolution

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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When Speas initially proposed the nine-lot Terraces at Mineral Springs, some were skeptical about its chances.

Not only was the real estate market in a downturn, but his concept of small homes went against the grain at a time when much of the market was focused on large houses.

“It was kind of a brand new concept here,” Speas said. “The market has changed. Now, I think, people aren’t building the huge homes. They’re more inclined to build what they need.”

The slow market when he started the subdivision was probably a blessing in disguise, Speas said. It gave him time to research and refine his concept, to tweak the designs to create houses that are comfortable yet so energy efficient that the electrical and gas bills are nominal.

Speas said he and his family lived in one of the houses for a year.

“It actually produced more energy than it consumed,” he said, thanks to the 18 200-watt solar panels on the roof. “The electricity produced not only paid for all the electricity used, it also paid for the gas bill.”

The houses are certified by a third party that gives them a home energy rating score, Speas said, noting these scores typically range from zero for a home that consumes no energy to 100 for a house built to current codes.

He compared the rating to fuel ratings in cars.

“You wouldn’t buy a car without knowing how many miles per gallon it gets,” he said.

The houses in the Terraces at Mineral Springs are craftsman and bungalow styles of about 1,500 square feet.

“You can’t put a garage in front here,” he said, noting that the older neighborhoods in the city all have garages along alleys. “If you do, you lose a little bit of the feeling we’re creating.

“Front doors are important in these houses. They have gables facing the street, and there are angled ceilings inside. They’re not big footprint homes, but they’re very flexible.”

The houses make use of passive solar energy, with large, specially treated windows that face south and allow natural light and heat in, and each is prepared for solar panels on the roof.

Building height and tree placement in the subdivision is restricted so every house gets the maximum amount of sun.

“No one casts a shadow on their neighbor,” Speas said.

The lots are only 67 feet wide, but they’re 400 to 500 feet deep, he said, and the zoning allows cottages to be built in the back yards.

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“That cottage could be an income property, a home office or studio, an apartment for a boomerang child,” he said. “The underlying zoning was for single-family or duplex houses, and we didn’t want a duplex in the traditional sense.”

Speas has been retained by Ansay Development Corp. to build homes around the Village Square in the first phase of the New Luxembourg development.

The energy efficient nature of the houses is likely to fit the stereotypical Luxembourger image of frugality, he noted.

“Luxembourgers are frugal in a very smart way. They value the dollar, and these homes will reflect that,” Speas said.

At the same time, the design features that will be integrated into the houses will appeal to buyers, Speas said, adding he will use a pattern book developed by Ansay Development in creating his houses.

“They’ll have the same values of an energy efficient, durable house built with sustainable materials,” he said. “The design will reflect a close-knit, walkable community.”

Speas said he will wrap up work on the two houses under construction in Port Washington, then expects to begin building in Belgium. At least two houses could be built yet this year, he said.

Image Information: PORT WASHINGTON DEVELOPER Mike Speas (right) and his son Matt are building a subdivision of small, energy-efficient homes on Division Street in Port Washington and will soon be taking their designs to Belgium, where they will be building houses in the New Luxembourg development. Photo by Sam Arendt