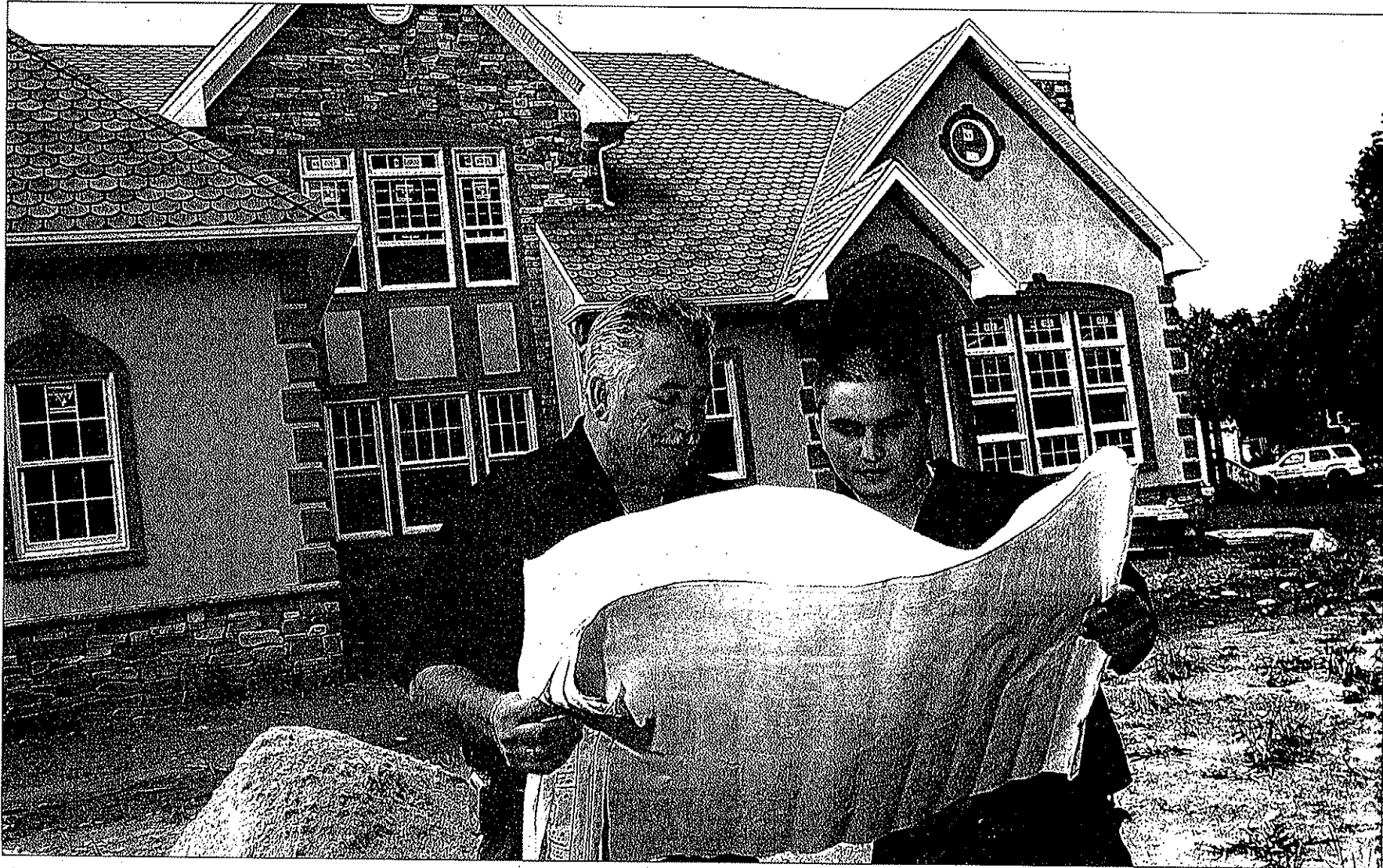


“They’re taking a small home and they’ll buy it for \$300,000, tear it down and build something that sells for \$900,000.”

LEO SAWICKI, CLARK RESIDENT



Rudolph Daunno III, left, and his son Rudolph look at plans outside a home being built by Daunno Development Co. on Armstrong Drive in Clark. Although some residents and officials complain the large houses are changing the character of Clark, others say the new construction is a sign of the township's rising fortunes.

GEORGE MENISH/THE STAR-LEDGER

Changing times brought home to Clark

For better or for worse, the trend is moving toward massive houses

BY MOLLY BLOOM
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

When Leo Sawicki's mother moved into her three-bedroom ranch on Evans Terrace in 1960, there were open spaces between the houses, and a modest colonial could be had for less than \$20,000.

Now two massive brick and stone houses face Sawicki's home, and a house down the block is about to be sold for seven figures.

"They're taking a small home and they'll buy it for \$300,000, tear it down and build something that sells for \$900,000," said Sawicki, 69, who lives in his mother's old house. "Probably this'll be sold one day too."

In Clark, the statewide real estate boom has made it profitable for developers to purchase older homes on large lots, knock them down and replace them with custom-built luxury housing. Critics derisively call the new homes "McMansions."

Some in the township, including Mayor Sal Bonaccorso, see the new construction as a sign of the township's rising fortunes. But others, including Councilman Brian Toal, think that it is changing the community for the worse.

Toal plans to introduce an ordinance limiting the height and square footage of new construction relative to lot size later

this year. Similar "McMansion laws" have already been enacted in wealthier towns, including Short Hills and Kinnelon, but this is the first time such an ordinance has been proposed in Clark.

New residential construction in Clark has grown dramatically in amount and size in recent years. This May and June, two of the busiest construction months, Clark issued permits for seven new homes, six of them more than 3,000 square feet, and 18 additions, three of them more than 2,000 square feet.

During the same period 12 years ago, the earliest date for which the township

has records, the only residential construction approved was one 2,900-square-foot house and nine additions, none more than 1,000 square feet.

This month, the planning board gave approval for five new 3,000-square-foot homes to be built on one of the last undeveloped, wooded areas in Clark.

Daunno Development Co., a Clark-based residential real estate development company currently building 14 houses in the township, is about to close the first seven-figure sale in town on a custom-built house complete with three-car garage on Armstrong Drive, said Rudolph Daunno III, the company's marketing director.

"At some point (the market's) going to
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Changes in Clark praised, decried

flatten out, but I don't think it's going to go down," said Rudolph Daunno Jr., the company's president and a former director at Mack-Cali Realty Corp., a multibillion-dollar real estate investment trust based in Cranford.

Neighbors have mixed feelings about the large houses in their back yards. Mary Ann Cahill, a 44-year-old mother of two who moved to Evans Terrace three years ago, welcomed the new construction saying it would increase the value of her own 1960s ranch. "It's better than having run-down houses, that's for sure," she said.

But Mary Fedosh, 78, who lives in a three-bedroom colonial just two houses down from the Daunno's million-dollar home on Armstrong Drive, wasn't so sure. "We're losing the prettiness of Clark," she said.

"It's too large for the size of the property," said her husband, Michael Fedosh, gesturing at the house.

At 15 Briarheath Lane, where there used to be a one-story ranch house built in 1963, a two-story brick manse with a gabled roof and two-story entryway is under construction in what Toal calls "the worst example" of how Clark is changing.

"It just completely does not belong where it is," he said. "It basically changes the character of the neighborhood."

Those changes grow exponentially, said Tony D'Agostino, owner of Clark's ERA Village Green Realtors, where Mayor Bonaccorso is a licensed real estate agent. "Once one person does one (large house) in the neighborhood, it triggers the rest," he said. "It's like a frenzy."

Change is inevitable, said Business Administrator John Laezza, who is a voting member of the planning board.

"Clark will never be the farm community it once was," Laezza said. "It's gone. It's never going to come back."

The type of town planning that would have kept Clark a semi-rural outpost of Elizabeth should have been put in place 50 years ago, said Bonaccorso. Failing that, all the township can do now is accommodate new development, he said.

To Bonaccorso, the new construction is a ringing endorsement for the township's future.

"What they're saying (by building in the township) is 'I like the town, I like the schools, I love my neighbors and I love Clark,'" he said. The large houses and other new construction also bring in increased tax rates, lowering the tax burden on other property owners, he said.

They also boost property values of smaller homes, D'Agostino said.

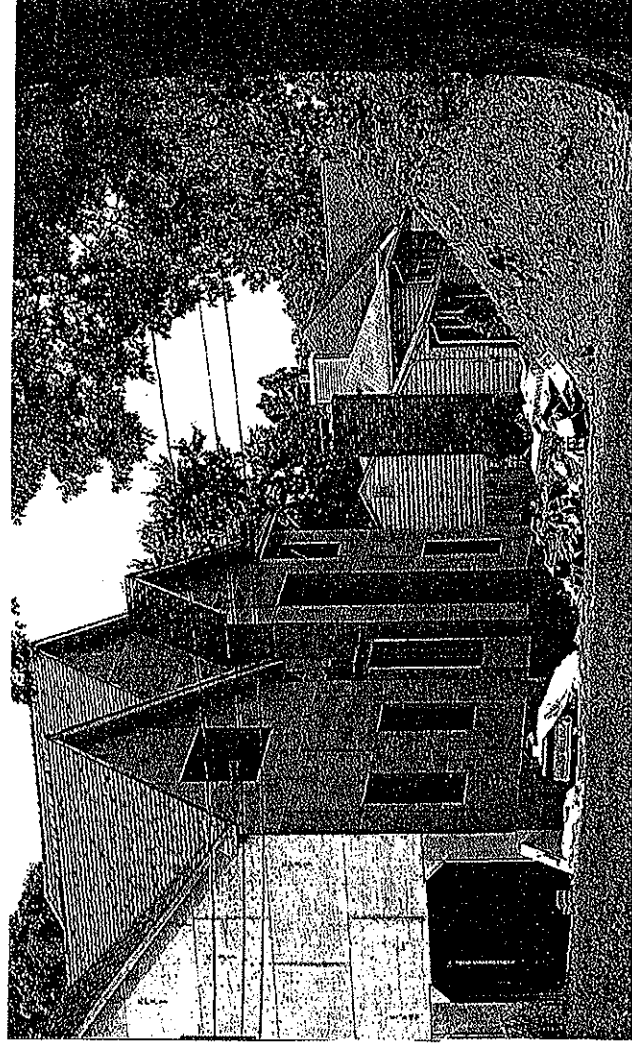
"In any neighborhood, in any town, if you've got a smaller home among the bigger homes, you benefit," he said. "If you can get into a neighborhood for less money among larger homes, that's the way to go."

But Mary Fedosh, who said she has received at least three offers for the yellow clapboard house and 15,000-square-foot lot she and her

husband bought for \$19,000 in 1950, loves Clark as it was — and is.

"This is my mansion," she said. "I sure wouldn't want to be here when they tear this down."

Molly Bloom covers Clark. She can be reached at mbloom@starledger.com or (908) 302-1504.



Houses being built by Daunno Development Co. go up on Thomas Drive in Clark.

GEORGE MANISH/THE STARLEDGER