

Crestview Station breaks ground Friday

First phase of transit-oriented development to have apartments, retail and office

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Construction on the first phase of Crestview Station, which promises to transform an old industrial site into one of Austin's biggest transit-oriented developments, will begin Friday.

The entire 73-acre, mixed-use project will be on a previously contaminated site in the North Austin neighborhood that required more than 18 months and \$5.5 million of environmental cleanup efforts before construction could begin.

The \$100 million project, which **will be on the Capital Metro commuter rail line that is scheduled to start service this year**, is expected to bring housing and retail and office space to the neighborhood.

On Friday, developers Stratus Properties Inc. and Trammell Crow Co. received the site development permit from the city. A month ago, they began digging a three-acre retention pond under another permit.

"The Crestview project will be a catalyst for redevelopment in this area," said Eric DeJernett, senior vice president and a Crestview project coordinator for Trammell Crow. "It's going to change the landscape in that part of town and create a lot of excitement for that area."

It will be the first big transit-oriented development on the rail line and will be well under way by the time the station opens in the fall. The site is bordered by North Lamar Boulevard and Morrow Street.

High Street Residential, a Trammell Crow subsidiary, will develop the first phase, Midtown Commons at Crestview, about 20 acres that wraps around the train station and includes 340 apartments. The first phase also will include 32,000 square feet of retail space and 32,000 square feet of office space. The retail section will include restaurants, shops and possibly a small grocery store, but developers have not begun signing tenants.

The apartments will have an average of 850 square feet. Studios will have 550 square feet, and two-bedroom units will have up to 900 square feet. Rents will average about \$1.50 per square foot, or \$1,125 for a 750-square-foot apartment.

"It's a true village," said Art Lomenick, managing director of Trammell Crow Co. and High Street Residential. "To have 70 acres to craft into an urban village is pretty unique to in-town Austin."

The company can build up to 900 more units in two or three more phases, which will probably include townhomes, duplexes, fourplexes and condominiums.

The second phase of the project, which will include 450 single-family homes, may begin in six months, and some of the homes may be ready as early as March 2009. Completion of the development will take five to seven years.

Austin Energy plans to purchase a two-acre site on the northern end of the tract to build a utility substation.

Within transit-oriented developments, "it's important to have a lot of density and mix of products and prices," said Stratus chief executive Beau Armstrong. "We worked hard to come up with that mix, and I think we've done it."

Originally, two national builders expressed interest in developing the single-family home project, but the housing slowdown has led to a change in plans. Stratus now plans to be the developer and sell lots to two or three builders, Armstrong said. Home prices will start in the mid-\$200,000s.

The environmental cleanup of the Crestview site was completed last year by Weston Solutions Inc. The company was hired to demolish the buildings that were once occupied by a Huntsman Corp. research facility and to clean up the site. Huntsman, which was on the site from 1949 to 2005, tested products that went into detergent, soap and foam. After the cleanup, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality last year approved residential use of the site.



Courtesy of JB Goodwin