

Mueller redevelopment exploring new frontiers in self-governance

With 20,000 residents and workers spread among 12 neighborhoods, coordination and cooperation are key to managing diverse community.

By [Suzannah Gonzales](#)
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF
Thursday, November 15, 2007

As the first Mueller residents prepare to move into their new homes starting at the end of the month, talks are under way on how Mueller will run as a city within a city, complete with its own governing council.

With a footprint larger than the size of downtown, the former airport site will eventually house 10,000 residents and 10,000 more employees.

In order to deal with the issues of a community that size, there will be 12 neighborhoods (both residential and commercial), elected neighborhood delegates serving two-year terms and the property owners association as the governing body.

Although residents must abide by City of Austin rules, the issues they will grapple with are varied, including meshing the desires of residents in different income brackets.

"A place like this has not been created in the Austin area," said Dee Desjardin, vice president of marketing for Catellus Development Group, the master developer of Mueller. "We're breaking new ground. We're figuring it out."

Catellus created an advisory panel to look at the residential rules of Mueller.

The panel, which started meeting last month and includes future residents and members of a city advisory commission, is taking input and will bring recommendations to Mueller's property owners association.

The plans for the mixed-use community on 711 acres call for at least 2,400 houses of different types and at least 2,200 apartments or condos. A quarter of all homes will be designated as affordable for families of four with incomes at or below \$56,900 for homeowners and \$42,650 for renters. Some homes are slated to sell for at least \$700,000.

Mueller will also be the home of the UT Health Research Campus and the headquarters of Southwest Educational Development Laboratory and Seton Family of Hospitals. The vision of the development includes grocery stores, several community pools, parks, an outdoor performance venue, a new elementary school and an old airport tower.

As in most planned communities, there are covenants, conditions and restrictions that establish Mueller's association and neighborhood concept. Mueller's rules, which fill a 2-inch binder, were approved by the Austin City Council in December 2004 as part of the agreement between Catellus and the city.

"It's like a beginning of a new community," said Corky Hilliard, a future resident who's on the panel. "It's like square one."

The panel's work will give the first homeowners something to work and live with, said Rick Krivoniak, a panel member who also serves on the city commission.

"Not everything is going to please everybody," Krivoniak said. "Hopefully, we can strike a good balance.

"I think people need to live here first and see how it's going to work out."

So far, future residents' questions have included inquiries about adding an outdoor storage shed, fencing and landscaping, Krivoniak said. "They're interested in how everything's going to operate."

Mueller's neighborhood concept might be the first of its kind in the urban core.

There are homeowner associations within the city limits, though none are as big as Mueller's will be, said Andrew Maebius, a lawyer representing Catellus. Homeowner associations didn't become common until the late 1970s, and the majority of Austin neighborhoods developed before then, he said.

The Mueller association was a result of the founding principal that Mueller pay for itself.

Catellus will have control of the association for several years before it's turned over to the property owners. Mueller residents will pay \$40 a month in homeowner dues, which will cover maintenance costs for features such as parks, pools and landscaping.

The first Mueller residents are meeting and have talked about registering with the city as a neighborhood group, Krivoniak said.

Krivoniak, who lives in Windsor Park just north of the Mueller development, doesn't expect there to be conflicts between Mueller and the surrounding neighborhoods. Those neighborhoods have been involved since the beginning in the mid-1980s, driving the development of Mueller and being proponents for density, he said.

Mark Boyden, the Austin Neighborhoods Council's representative for the Northeast sector, which includes Mueller, doesn't think the Mueller association will have any more weight than other neighborhoods. "Why would it? It's another neighborhood voice in our community," he said.

Jim Walker, chairman of the city commission, said he hopes that the Mueller of 20 or 30 years from now is part of the fabric of Austin, rather than an island.

"If no one at Mueller who lives at Mueller never leaves Mueller, I don't know if that's a good thing," Walker said.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin