



Retail center planned in Northwest Austin

\$70M complex would add 300K square feet of retail, dining, entertainment.

By Shonda Novak
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The region's first major retail project to be announced in nearly three years is planned for 69 acres at RM 620 near RM 2222, across from the new Concordia University campus and a Walmart.

Developers Rodney Speaks and Leslie Perry Sloan plan to break ground by June on the Trails at 620, a \$70 million, 300,000-square-foot center at RM 620 and Wilson Parke Avenue, pending approval of a site-development permit from the City of Austin within the next six months.

The project's developers are targeting a summer 2011 opening. They hope to attract a movie theater, hotel, specialty grocery store and clothing, sporting goods and bookstores, as well as local retailers and restaurants to the affluent area, Sloan said.

"We don't want this to be just another strip mall," Sloan said. "We want it to have a very Austin flair."

Negotiations are under way with several theater owners and hotel groups, said Jeff Townsend, a principal who heads the Austin office of Edge Realty Partners, which the developers tapped to recruit retailers.

Sloan and Speaks are the general partners of the development group, 69 Grandview LP, which includes several other local partners. Sloan and Speaks also developed Vista Ridge at Steiner Ranch, a retail center on North Quinlan Park Road.

Sloan said the Trails land is the largest undeveloped parcel in that immediate area that is ready to build on. Utilities and zoning are in place, as well as an environmental permit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sloan said.

A large greenbelt runs across the rear of the property, which backs up to the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.

In addition to shops and restaurants, Sloan said the project will have playscapes, ponds and two miles of trails.

The plan is to make the large oak trees on the site and the views the focal point, she said. "We are going to extreme measures to design around some very, very beautiful trees."

Townsend said the project is "probably the only new development in Austin of its size" that is expected to get built over the next couple of years, as retail development has virtually ground to a stop amid the recession and financing constraints.

Chris Ellis, managing principal of Endeavor Real Estate Group, said it could be even longer before other new projects emerge, because financing remains difficult to obtain.

Other than the Trails, "there's still no new development on the horizon, and it will be a good while (years) before we see any," he said.

Although some residents in the area would like to see the Trails tract remain undeveloped, one neighborhood representative, Jim Smitherman, said the plans for the site are the best he's seen among others previously proposed.

Smitherman is a member of the development committee for the Parke Homeowners Association, which represents about 180 of the 320 households in the Grandview Hills subdivision within a mile of the development.

He said the project would bring much-needed local retailers and local restaurants.

"We're starving for good sit-down restaurants," Smitherman said. "We're excited for the potential this project has."

Besides Walmart, the center is near a Home Depot, a Target and an H-E-B grocery store.

But Endeavor's Ellis said the area is short on dining and entertainment options. The Trails project "will fill a void in these areas," he said.

Sloan said that besides a dearth of local retailers, the area is lacking in grocery options other than H-E-B.

"We think the market is deep enough for more than one grocery," she said.

Townsend said the Trails leasing assignment brings Edge Realty's Austin office portfolio to 2 million square feet, one of the largest in the region.

Edge Realty's leasing efforts will be coordinated by Krista Dabney Dillard, the new director of leasing in the Austin office. Dillard formerly was director of brokerage services for Direct Development's Austin office.

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Demographics within five miles of the planned Trails at 620 retail project

- Average household income: \$112,749
- Population: more than 100,000 people
- Education levels : more than 62 percent have a bachelors degree or higher

Proposed retail development

The Trails at 620 would be a 300,000-square-foot development anchored by:

- 50,000-sq.-ft.-sporting goods retailer
- 43,800-sq.-ft.-theater
- 35,000-sq.-ft.-supermarket

