

# After controversies, WalMart set to open

*Northcross store has sparked protests and lawsuits over the years.*

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Four years after WalMart Stores Inc.'s plans for a store at Northcross Center set off neighborhood protests and two lawsuits, **the 99,000-square-foot store is set to open at 7:30 a.m. Wednesday.**

It will be the 18th store in Central Texas for the world's largest retailer and area's No. 2 grocer, and more stores are bound for the region, said Julie Martin, Wal-Mart's regional general manager for South Texas.

Martin said Austin and San Antonio are "high growth areas" for Wal-Mart yet have been underserved by the retailer, she said. Wal-Mart plans to grow in those areas

Daniel Morales, Wal-Mart's media director for the South, said there are no projects to announce at this time.

However, Manor and Kyle are high on Wal-Mart's radar screen, said a local real estate source who declined to be identified because locations in those areas are preliminary.

**The Northcross store, on West Anderson Lane near Burnet Road, will have 250 full- and part-time employees and feature expanded grocery and electronic sections and a drive-through pharmacy.**

The store is one of the retailer's newer prototypes, with a layout designed to make shopping more convenient, in part by more closely grouping products that customers purchase most often. The in-store pharmacy, for example, is near the groceries instead of at the rear of the store. Pet supplies are not far from health and beauty products; sodas are grouped near the beer.

The Northcross location is projected to handle about the same number of customers as some other local Walmarts, even though it is half their size.

Like all new Walmarts, the store includes features to reduce energy and water consumption and minimize waste. They include skylights, low-flush toilets and a reflective roof to reduce cooling costs.

The store also will operate a recycling program.

Martin said the store is expected to draw shoppers from a three-mile radius. H-E-B, the dominant grocer in Central Texas, has a store about 1.5 miles south on Burnet Road that is undergoing a major remodel, while No. 3 grocer Randalls has a store about two miles away at Spicewood Springs Road and Mesa Drive.

Wal-Mart's original plans called for a two-story, 225,000-square-foot store and a three-story parking garage.

A group called Responsible Growth for Northcross, representing residents from several nearby neighborhoods, sued the city and developer Lincoln Property Co. over the legality of the site plan for the larger store. The lawsuit did not succeed, but Wal-Mart ultimately made compromises, including reducing the store size, eliminating the garage and limiting truck delivery times to reduce noise at night.

In a statement Monday, Jason Meeker, the spokesman for RG4N, as it is known, said the group is working to build lines of communication with the store manager "to address unresolved community concerns about traffic, truck routes, crime and disabled access."

However, Meeker said, the group "still respects the decision by Wal-Mart and Lincoln Property Co. to build a store that might fit better within its neighborhoods in terms of size, and not overwhelm local businesses."

Jan Triplett, an Allandale resident and member of RG4N, said the group will continue to monitor the store's effect on small businesses in the area, among other issues.

"Going from something the size of Cabela's to something that is slightly smaller than what the Sports Authority (a former Northcross retailer) was is a really significant win for everybody, and hopefully it will remain so," Triplett said.



**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**