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All aboard! (except two)

Most developments planned for commuter rail stops still on track

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The future of two mixed-use projects planned for the new commuter rail stops is bleak, **but other projects are poised to stay on track.**

Investors have failed to save a \$400 million mixed-use project called Lakeline Station near the rail stop of the same name after its developer, PCG Summit-Lakeline Station, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy last August. Nearly half of the proposed project's 327-acre site near the intersection of U.S. Highway 183 and RR 620 has gone back to the site's previous owner, William Savage, while the remaining portion — for which PCG made enough payments to own — is subject to liens by secured creditors. Savage's portion will return to being ranchland, while the remaining portion will likely be sold by its two major creditors, California-based real estate private equity fund Diversified Pacific Opportunity Fund I LLC and Franklin Bank, said James Hinds, Savage's attorney.

Diversified's and Franklin's attorneys could not be reached for comment.

David Armbrust, the attorney who represented PCG Summit, said the entire site — zoned planned unit development — was contemplated as one development and that it's unlikely the two portions can be developed apart without city intervention.

Another mixed-use project planned just west of the Lakeline Station project by the same developer, the 178-acre Northwood at Lakeline development, has also been foreclosed on by its creditor, IBC Bank.

While the vision for the future Lakeline rail stop — one of nine stops on the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority's 32-mile MetroRail commuter line, expected to begin service later this month — is cloudy, it's not without a silver lining.

To the south of the proposed Northwood at Lakeline project, Austin-based Simmons Vedder & Co. has completed two office buildings totaling 230,000 square feet in its 70-acre mixed-use project called The Crossings at Lakeline. That project calls for 1.5 million square feet of office space, 1,400 multifamily units and 29,000 square feet of retail. Jeff Pace, vice president of office development for Simmons Vedder, said given market conditions, the next phase's time line hasn't been determined.

At other rail stations, several projects are under way or planned in areas earmarked by the city for transit-oriented developments — mixed-use, walkable communities centered around transit. Zoning plans at each half-mile radius of the rail stops — many already zoned commercial or industrial — provide for denser, pedestrian-friendly uses and special provisions for density bonuses and affordable housing.

Developer Steve Portnoy is getting ready to submit a site plan for a mixed-use project on East Seventh Street near the Plaza Saltillo stop on Comal Street. Plans include 8,000 square feet of retail, 5,000 square feet of office and about 35 condo units.

Also at the Plaza Saltillo stop, Cap Metro owns 11 acres that it plans to eventually develop into a TOD and is conducting a feasibility analysis, said Lucy Galbraith, transit-oriented development manager for Cap Metro.

Near the MLK Jr. stop at MLK Jr. Boulevard and Alexander Avenue, Will Meredith, the son of former Dell Chief Financial Officer Tom Meredith, is developing Chestnut Plaza. The 30-acre, multiphase project has 64 homes and will include a “nonprofit village” and about 30,000 square feet for office and retail uses.

At the Crestview stop, located at Airport and Lamar boulevards, Trammell Crow will deliver the first of 316 apartment units in its Midtown Commons project next month. That 73-acre project also includes 64,000 square feet of retail and commercial space completed last month, and 550 single-family homes that are under construction. Stan Erwin, senior managing director at Trammell Crow, said those homes will go to market this spring.

At the Leander stop — the northern terminus of the rail — plans for a 2,300 acre TOD have percolated for several years. Cap Metro, which owns 14 acres there, has partnered with Austin-based Hughes Capital Management to develop about 60 acres in the area closest to the commuter rail stop, said Galbraith. A preliminary concept plan crafted by Maryland-based planning firm Torti Gallas & Partners is expected to be presented at Leander’s Planning and Zoning Commission later this month.

Dallas-based WY Atlantis, which for years has planned to build hundreds of homes and about 400,000 square feet of office in the Leander TOD, is behind its original schedule but is conducting a feasibility study now, said Pix Howell, Leander’s urban design officer.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin