

Development gaining steam at Mueller

Apartments, grocery among projects set

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The Austin Playhouse's planned building.

A 301-unit apartment complex is set to break ground this year at the Mueller development, according to developers involved in the project.

Besides the future apartments, more announcements are in the pipeline and others have already broken ground at the 700-acre mixed-use urban infill development just north of downtown.

The increased activity — including grocery retail, hospital and arts projects — has reinforced belief that Mueller has picked up steam after the recession appeared to slow construction there. The city said it's happy with the way the project is moving again and inching closer to fulfilling planners' visions of a new urbanism model.

"Mueller has been a real success at leveraging public land to achieve community goals through planning and collaboration between the developer, the city and the community," said **Pamela Hefner**, Mueller project manager for the city of Austin.

Hefner said the project has proven to be a model for building sustainably on a large scale, while generating observable long-lasting economic benefits through an increased tax base and job creation. So far, Mueller has generated \$350 million to \$400 million in revenue for the city, which spent \$113 million on new infrastructure. And so far, \$645 million in privately funded buildings have been built at the site.

The city counts 3,300 permanent jobs to date at Mueller. That includes work going on at the Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas. It's estimated that 10,000 people will be working at Mueller as the project reaches full development in the coming years.

Right now, contracting opportunities are available for infrastructure jobs, including road construction, utilities and lot preparation. Jobs will also become available for an extension of Berkman Drive, according to Catellus Development Corp, the project's master developer.

As for the new apartment complex, Looney Ricks Kiss – LRK Inc. was chosen as the architect and Rampart Construction LP is the general contractor.

Meanwhile, a 221-single-family home development was recently announced near Mueller's future town center. David Weekly Homes Inc., Standard Pacific Homes Inc., Streetman Homes LP and one other unnamed homebuilder will be building there. The fourth homebuilder will likely be announced later this fall.

"I think on the residential side, there were a few early on who loved Mueller, but then along came the slowdown," said **Gregory Weaver**, executive vice president of development at Catellus Development.

Plans were also announced this year for a 75,000-square-foot HEB, which is expected to break ground in 2012. The architect is Lake Flato Architects Inc.

And in November, DMA Development Corp. LLC will preview its four-floor apartment complex for residents 55 and older. The complex is the first phase of a two-phase project multifamily, mixed-income and mixed-use development that will have 201 units when completed.

Meanwhile, Dell Children's Medical Center has broken ground on a third bed wing, which should be complete in 2013. Dell named The Beck Group as its general contractor for that 83,000-square-foot project.

Weaver said the hospital project progressed much faster than anticipated because of increased demand.

Adding to Mueller's diversity has been some announcements involving arts institutions, including news that the Austin Children's Museum will move from downtown to Mueller. Details on that project are pending.

Weaver has heard some people refer to a budding arts community as more performing arts centers show interest in Mueller.

The Austin Independent School District Performing Arts Center is expected to break ground on a 57,000-square-foot complex in mid-2012. That project's architect is Pfluger & Associates, and the general contractor is American Constructors.

The Austin Playhouse is building a 16,000-square-foot theatrical space in Mueller's future town center. That should break ground in spring 2012. The architect is Dick Clark Architecture.

Being able to attract the arts has been a boon to the development's mix, Weaver said.

"Usually landing an art component is a challenge; so we are fortunate that those three groups got interested in Mueller," he said.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin