

N. Austin to get major hotel

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An Aloft hotel planned for just west of U.S. Highway 183 near Lakeline Mall is bigger than previously reported and behind schedule.

The upscale hotel that will cater largely to business travelers will total 215 rooms and 114,000 square feet, split into a four-story and six-story building, according to city records.

Previous local media reports said it would be a 131-room, 60,000-square-foot hotel. With 215 rooms, the hotel would be among the 20 largest in Austin.

The hotel, originally slated to break ground this month, has been held up at Austin City Hall because of “hairy” drainage and tree issues, Austin city planner **Sarah Graham** said.

The developer, Austin-based Pure Lodging Hospitality, has not indicated whether it has financing, but has been “working very hard and diligently” to obtain city approval, Graham said, adding that she expects the hotel to have a permit within two months.

Naran Patel of Pure Lodging Hospitality, which also operates a Comfort Suites in town, could not be reached.

Project engineer **Bryan Moore** of Consort Inc. declined to comment about the project, which is planned on about five acres of undeveloped land near the Lakeline Red Line commuter rail stop.

The project’s proposal, submitted to the city in May, was one of the first in Austin to bump up this year against stricter rules regarding the removal of large trees in the city, Graham said.

Instead of seeking to remove the trees, the developers worked around them, she said.

If the hotel project breaks ground quickly, it will benefit the entire area, said real estate broker **Jeff Pace** of Simmons Vedder Partners.

The area has already seen some activity, and La Quinta Inn & Suites opened an 80-room hotel there in July.

Simmons Vedder owns nearby land connected to the Lakeline rail stop.

It has already developed 235,000 square feet of office space as part of a planned 2.5 million-square-foot mixed-use development, which could add up to 1.5 million square feet of office space, 1,469 multifamily units and 29,000 square feet of retail.

The immediate area already has a significant concentration of retail and restaurants, and a new hotel could support and attract more corporate players, Pace said.

Roy Benear of the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau said the new Aloft hotel's location near the Red Line won't have a big impact on the convention business in downtown Austin.

But building a large hotel along Highway 183 is "a very smart" move if the hotel plans to tap business travelers, Benear said.

The Aloft brand is already doing business at The Domain, where a 140-room Aloft opened in November 2009. The Aloft brand is part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc., described as having urban-influenced design, accessible technology, style and a social atmosphere. Starwood Hotels is also behind the new W Austin Hotel & Residences downtown.

Other than the name, however, the two Alofts are not connected, an employee at The Domain location said.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin