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Austin's Steiner Ranch residents balk at Randalls

Supermarket chain will listen to concerns but its planned shopping center still a go

Austin Business Journal - by [Francisco Vara-Orta](#) ABJ Staff

Residents in the Steiner Ranch community have mounted a campaign to oppose a California developer's plans for a 163,027-square-foot Randalls-anchored shopping center. The proposed shopping center was announced last month, turning rumors of Steiner Ranch getting a Randalls, which have persisted for more than a decade, into reality.

Pleasanton, Calif.-based Property Development Centers, a wholly owned subsidiary of Randalls' parent company **Safeway Inc.**, is in the final stages of acquiring 61 acres near the intersection of Highway 620 and Quinlan Park Road for the development anchored by a 60,000-square-foot Randalls. Construction is slated to begin this fall and be completed before Thanksgiving in 2011.

Some residents and businesses quickly took to community blogs and an online petition, signed by 465 unique users in the month since Randalls' announcement May 20, to oppose the project. Residents wrote in their comments about the impact it could have on traffic and the environment because it's close to Lake Travis northwest of Austin.

Some expressed a preference for a **Whole Foods Market**, saying that's more fitting with the neighborhood's upscale culture.

"This is a real setback for Steiner Ranch by making traffic on 620 even worse and really depreciating the overall aesthetic," said James Lanyon, a Steiner Ranch resident and senior vice president of strategic services at **Sanders Wingo Advertising**, who started the petition. He plans to forward the petition to city planning officials to add to the letters and calls the city and the developer are getting.

Steiner Ranch is regarded as an upscale planned community, with more than 4,000 single-family homes and apartment units near Lake Travis, an area that environmentalists have fiercely protected as Austin's population grows outward. Steiner has 274 acres of commercial or mixed-use land available for sale within its 4,600-acre community, officials have said.

Randalls has said the shopping center, which will also include a bank, several restaurants, retail shops and a medical office building, will occupy 15 of the 61 acres it will buy. The rest will be left for open space, said Brian Dowling, a spokesman for the developer.

But getting the project derailed by lobbying city officials will be difficult.

City of Austin officials said the Randalls project has been submitted as an administrative site plan. Those plans do not go to a public hearing at the **Planning Commission** for a vote unless there is a specific zoning issue involved. And because the project is in the city's extended territorial jurisdiction, there is no zoning at the site.

The city's case manager, Donna Galati, said the application submitted complies with the permitted land use according to guidelines established by the city for Steiner Ranch's development in 2000. So once the applicant's plan shows compliance with all city requirements, the city of Austin is required to approve the permit, Galati said.

Randalls' executives said they are open to speaking with the community but plan to move ahead with plans in Steiner Ranch, eight miles from the nearest Randalls in Lakeway. Dowling said Randalls is planning a meeting with community officials and groups, but said it would have done so even without the controversy.

"Randalls has been serving the Austin market continuously for nearly 40 years, and we look forward to extending that record through this important project," Dowling said. "I think once the community gets a chance to see what we have in mind, we can change some minds to support it."

Courtesy of JB Goodwin