

Wal-Mart to finally start building Northcross store

Neighbors say they're satisfied with scaled-back store plans.

By [Brian Gaar](#)

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Wal-Mart Stores Inc. will soon start work on its long-delayed store at Northcross Center, according to the mall's owner and an Austin neighborhood association officer.

The store could be completed by October — nearly four years after Wal-Mart set off a citywide controversy over big-box retailing with plans to build a two-story superstore at the struggling North Austin mall.

Robert Dozier, executive vice president of Lincoln Property Co., the Dallas-based owner of Northcross, said construction on the Walmart is expected to begin this month or in early January.

Lincoln is renovating other parts of the mall, which includes stores, restaurants and the Chaparral Ice skating rink.

The store is expected to open in the fourth quarter of 2010, Dozier said.

Donna Beth McCormick, president of the Allandale Neighborhood Association, said she met last month with Wal-Mart representatives who said work will start next month and showed her a rendering of the new store.

At nearly 98,000 square feet and a single story, it is less than half the size of the store Wal-Mart proposed in 2006.

The new store will not be open 24 hours a day, McCormick said, which was a concern in the neighborhood. It will close at midnight or 1 a.m., she said.

McCormick said she's relieved that the store design isn't the traditional "big box" look. She said the representatives told her the store would be completed next October.

"It's more complementary to the neighborhood, and it's not like one of those Walmarts that you see on the freeway," McCormick said.

Wal-Mart spokeswoman Kellie Duhr said the rendering and the opening date were preliminary. The city has not yet given final approval to the site plan.

At Wal-Mart's request, the neighborhood association removed a copy of the rendering from its Web site on Wednesday. It showed a facade with a slightly curved roof line and a mix of materials.

The scaled-back store represents a compromise between the company and some neighborhood residents, who launched protests and lawsuits when the company and Lincoln announced plans to build a store at Northcross, creating a strong new anchor for the mall.

The mall, at Burnet Road and West Anderson Lane, had been losing tenants for years. But some neighbors objected to the idea of a giant Walmart there, saying it would create traffic problems and threaten small retailers.

Lawsuits by the Allandale association and a group called Responsible Growth for Northcross against the city, and Lincoln in the case of RG4N, failed to stop the project.

While work continued in other parts of the mall, Wal-Mart held off on starting work while the lawsuits continued and has been working on a revised design for months.

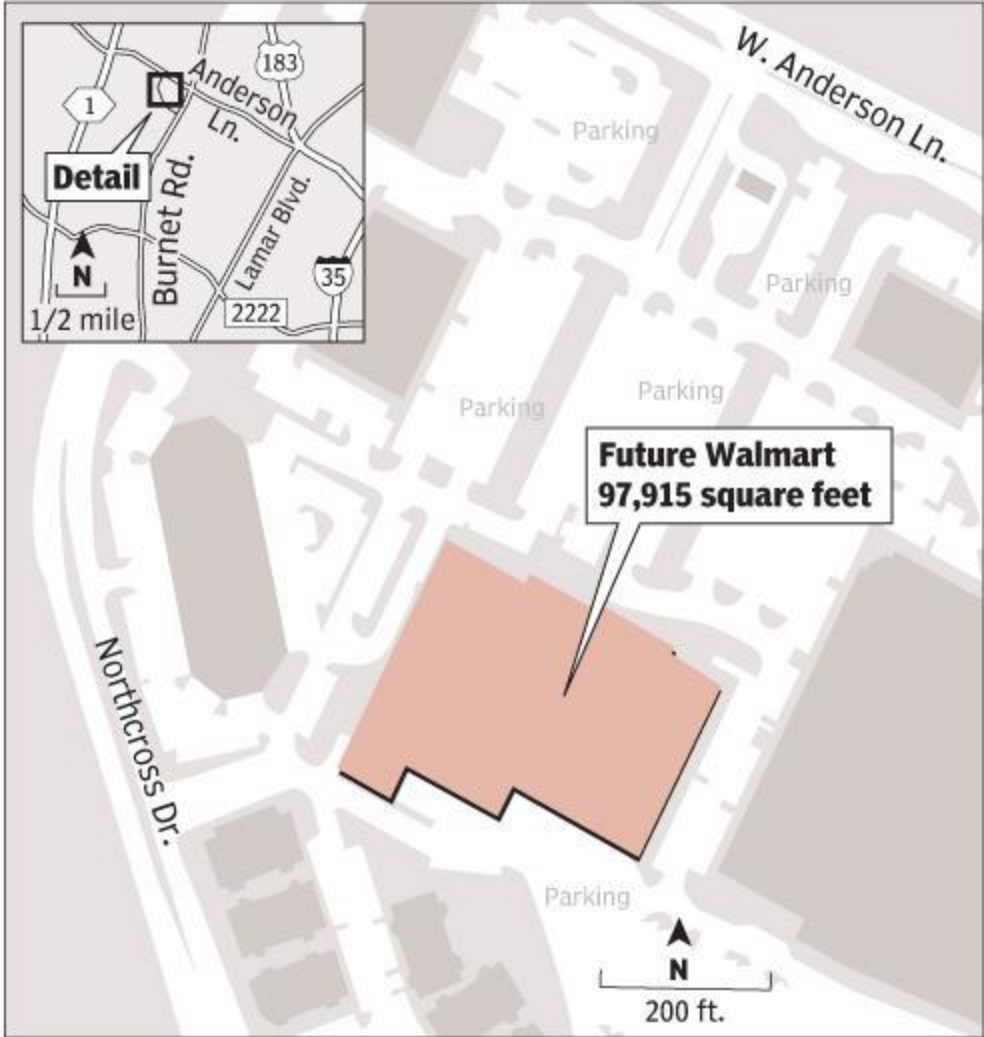
Wal-Mart reduced the size of the store, eliminated a proposed garden center and switched the parking from a

garage to surface lots.

Jason Meeker, vice president of Responsible Growth for Northcross, also said the scaled-down store was a better fit for the neighborhood.

"Is it a win for us? Yeah, to a degree, but it's a win for the neighborhood and also for the developer and Wal-Mart," he said.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin



Robert Calzada AMERICAN-STATESMAN