



CONSTRUCTION SITE: Easton Marketplace will reshape a 200-acre piece of the Spartanburg landscape. The view here is to the southeast, looking toward East Main Street. Projected completion of the project is 2009. It will be the largest mix-use development in the city.

Jeffrey Young/Staff

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Development adds to Eastside boom

BY GARY HENDERSON
staff writer

The historic tension between environmental groups and developers made Upstate Forever's recent invitation to the table for discussions about a massive Eastside construction project seem downright groundbreaking.

Just as surprising, officials involved with the project said, was that Centennial American, the Greenville company that plans to turn the former Lan-Yair golf course into a 200-acre development of retail stores, upscale residences and luxury apartments, listened.

Angela Viney, director of the Upstate Forever office in Spartanburg, said the initial plans for the

development were for "a very typical shopping center."

"We asked them to look at the alternate design," Viney said. "They agreed to all of it."

"All of it" meant moving the retail stores farther back from East Main Street, changes at the entrance to the development to make it more appealing, the use of the seven existing ponds on the property for storm water control, additional green space and changes that would give the area "more of a village" feel.

Viney said the end result from the environmental preservation group's collaboration with Centennial was a

design unlike anything that exists in Spartanburg.

"I think it says something about their commitment," Viney said. "It's an opportunity to provide something unique and vibrant, yet appealing."

The \$100-million development will be called Easton Marketplace. It will feature 140 single-family homes; 500,000 square feet of retail space, three that are big-box style; restaurants; a multi-screen theater; and apartments that will be built by Spartanburg-based Johnson Development.

Months of discussions involving city government, county officials, the environmental group and the developer led to the unusual collaborations that evolved.

Pete Brett, a 1994 Wofford College graduate and director of project development with Centennial, said he had an intimate connection with the site.

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"I used to play golf out there," Brett said. "I have a lot of golf balls in those ponds."

Brett said the size of the development made it important to consider the impact and connectivity of the property to its surroundings.

"We've tried to sit down with a lot of people," Brett said. "We look at it as a partnership."

Brett acknowledged Centennial has commitments from "quite a few" national, regional and local retailers, but he declined to disclose the names.

"We don't do commitment releases," Brett said. "We leave that up to the individual retailers."

Julie Franklin, Spartanburg's Director of Economic Development, said the project will bring about \$160 million in capital development to the area.

Franklin said engineers are already beginning to evaluate traffic patterns in the Hillcrest area for the best ways to minimize impact from the increased vehicle count that will come to the area as stores begin to open and after residents move into the homes.

"There will be a possible extension of Webber Road over to Plainview," Franklin said.

The project, Franklin said, will add a significant number of new homes for people who want to live inside the city.

Easton Marketplace will generate a revenue stream of \$1 million a year in new taxes for the first three years, Franklin said. It should be in the \$2-million range within six years when build-out is complete.

Several concept designs for the property have been considered in the past, but officials say Centennial is the first "serious" developer.

Currently, the area of the old golf course is outside the city limits. County Council recently unanimously approved a property-tax break of 30 percent on the site that will be effective for 15 years.

The development site will soon be annexed into the city.

Chris Story, assistant county administrator, said the money generated by the tax reduction will be reinvested in infrastructure, public amenities and the relocation of a major power line

that passes over the property.

Story said besides the city, District 7 schools and the county will also see increases in tax revenue.

Story, in recommending the fee-in-lieu arrangement, told County Council that Easton Marketplace merited approval for the tax reduction because it had characteristics that were different from "typical projects."

"We hope this project will serve to increase the likelihood that those concepts will be incorporated into other future commercial projects throughout the county," Story said.

For two years, the area east of where East Main Street crosses the Lawson's Fork Creek has seen a boom in retail development.

Both Lowe's and The Home Depot opened stores. Out-parcel development has occurred in three locations on the Wal-Mart Superstore site.

Ross', Petco and Panera Bakery all opened stores.

And currently, the Hillcrest Shopping Center and Hillcrest Specialty Row are getting a major makeover.

Starbuck's is scheduled to complete construction and open late this summer or in early fall on the Hillcrest site as well.

Stephanie Monroe, the city's planning director, said Easton Marketplace continues with the already strong growth that's been evident for some time on the city's Eastside.

Monroe said the Eastside of Spartanburg has been in developers' sights for a long time.

"The rooftop count that was occurring (on the Westside) has leveled off," Monroe said. "Now the development, we are seeing is going east."

At press time, a public meeting with the developers, city and county officials and representatives from Upstate Forever was scheduled to take place in the parking lot at The Home Depot.

Julie Franklin said the city's large tract ordinance requires public input in this kind of development.

"I don't want people to think while we spent a lot of time negotiating a project it doesn't mean the public is not part of the process."

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