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## Wal-Mart to anchor Audubon Center

Poplar Level grocery to be open 24 hours

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A Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market will be the anchor store in Audubon Center, planned for Illinois Avenue and Poplar Level Road.

The 40,600-square-foot store, which will be open around the clock, is the largest retailer planned for the wooded 12.5 acres immediately south of Norton Audubon Hospital.

Jefferson Development Group, headed by Kevin Cogan, is developing the project.

Rob Webber, director of development for the company, said the project also will include these restaurants: Chili's Grill & Bar, Panera Bread, Subway, Qdoba and a Starbucks coffee shop. The center will have 67,489 square feet of retail space.

"We have about 13 acres, of which almost a third is dedicated to green space and tree preservation that we will never touch," Webber said. "It's really going to be a place people can walk to."

The name of the grocery was not announced when the development plans were approved by the Jefferson County Planning Commission last year.

When plans for Audubon Center were introduced in February 2004, they included a Home Depot store. The plans, however, later changed to include a grocery, 12 patio homes and other, smaller stores.

Neighbors living along Illinois Avenue, which runs along the site, had protested, claiming the project would increase noise and traffic.

Developers held meetings with neighbors to address their concerns. Cogan agreed to reduce the size of the project, eliminate a proposed entrance from Illinois Avenue and add landscaping. He also agreed to change the layout to keep truck traffic off Illinois Avenue.

Still, many neighbors said they would have preferred a strictly residential development.

Pat Petrosky, a leader of the Audubon Area Neighborhood Association who coordinated the opposition, said he has come to terms with Audubon Center.

"We've accepted it," he said. "We made the best of what could've been a bad situation."

But Mary Steinbock, who's lived on Illinois for 45 years, said she's still upset.

"The restaurants out front are acceptable, but as far as the grocery store, we still don't think something like that should be put in over there," Steinbock said. "We love the beauty of it as it is now."

Webber said groundbreaking is scheduled for Feb. 15. Site work, such as removing large amounts of rock, will be completed during the winter months. He expects the development to be ready for business around Thanksgiving.

Webber said the center will be something that neighbors will appreciate.

"I think the meetings allowed us the opportunity to meet in the middle," he said. "We worked really hard on making it a complement."