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Work under way at Audubon Center

Development had faced neighborhood opposition earlier

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After two years of negotiations over its design, the Audubon Center retail development is to open by the end of the year.

The development, which will have a 40,600-square-foot Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market as its anchor, is being built on about 13 acres at Poplar Level Road and Illinois Avenue, near Norton Audubon Hospital.

Jefferson Development Group, headed by Kevin Cogan, introduced plans for the development in February 2004. But neighbors objected because the anchor store would have been a Home Depot that they said was too large and did not complement the area.

Robb Webber, director of development for the development company, said changes since then include the smaller anchor, more green space, outdoor seating and a gazebo, and a more pedestrian-friendly feel.

About four acres was set aside as a woodland protection area that will be cared for by a coalition of tenants, Webber said. Most of that area is between Illinois Avenue and the development.

Some neighbors who once protested the project now feel better about it.

Mary Steinbock, who lives on Illinois Avenue, said there is a nice buffer between the neighborhood and the development.

"We just thank God that we have our wrap-around protection that we got," Steinbock said. "It means the world to us to know that we don't have to look out there and see all that that's going on."

Mary Petrosky, who also lives on Illinois Avenue, said most neighbors are satisfied with the buffer but don't really like the construction noise. "We just hope it gets done with as soon as possible," she said.

Most of the site has been cleared and is primed for construction, Webber said.

In addition to Wal-Mart, other retailers include Chili's Bar & Grill, Panera Bread, Qdoba Mexican Grill and Starbucks with a drive-through. Sun Tan City also will open in the center.

Developers are still working on deals with a sub-sandwich shop and an ice-cream parlor, Webber said.

The Wal-Mart market, which will be similar to the one in St. Matthews, will be open 24 hours a day.

Mike Scalise, mayor of neighboring Audubon Park, said the community will support the development because the area needs sit-down restaurants.

"I think it will be an asset to the neighborhood," Scalise said. "People do want restaurants and people also want the ice-cream place or the coffee place where they can walk to it. It will be a destination people can walk to in the evening."

Webber said new sidewalks on Illinois Avenue and Audubon Plaza Drive will encourage walking to and from the development. He also said a 24-hour pharmacy at Wal-Mart will be convenient for those coming from the hospital.

Reporter Scheri Smith can be reached at (502) 582-4133.



Most of the site for the Audubon Center has been cleared and is primed for construction. Tenants will include a Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, Chili's Bar & Grill, Panera Bread, Qdoba Mexican Grill and Starbucks. (By Arza Barnett, The Courier-Journal)