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## New development in store for Cedar Park Town Center

by Stephen Burnett January 22, 2014 2014-01-22T00:12:00

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New development in store for Town Center



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### First business opens, more are planned for re-envisioned Cedar Park area

After Costco opened Nov. 22 at Whitestone Boulevard and Toll 183A, more businesses are launching in the Town Center development even as some residents lament the lost concept of a new downtown for pedestrians. City officials in the 1990s envisioned the 49-acre property as a downtown district for the city. Walkways would have connected city buildings, a recreation center and small retail shops to nearby homes. But in 2011 the city and the property's developer, The Ainbinder Company, began going a different direction—toward larger stores intended for customers in vehicles. The residential area tucked behind the active commercial development will have new restaurant neighbors including In-N-Out Burger, Verts Kebap, BJ's Brewhouse and Chipotle Mexican Grill. Many of those will open by this summer, developer Michael Ainbinder said, and next to Costco a home furnishings store called At Home is expected to open in late fall.

#### Costco's opening

Phil Brewer, Cedar Park economic development director, said city officials won't know until February how much sales tax revenue Costco brought to the city in 2013. Even then, figures will be two months behind and confidential, Brewer said. The Costco project proceeded after Cedar Park City Council in September 2012 settled on an agreement that split sales and property taxes generated by the new retailer. In all, 25 percent of sales taxes and 20 percent of property taxes generated by the store go to Costco and land owner Cedar Park Town Center LP—up to \$6 million or for 15 years, whichever comes first. In return, the property developer must pay at least \$1.33 million toward greenbelt upgrades, utilities, turn lanes along Whitestone Boulevard and Toll 183A, and a bridge over the Town Center pond. Dr. James Maness, vice president of Town Center HOA, praised what he said was city leaders' and Costco's willingness to work with Town Center residents.

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**How do you feel about the new vision for Cedar Park's Town Center?**

"[Costco's] huge investment in landscaping and their investment in building design and in trying to insulate or protect the residents—our neighborhood—from some of the typical unpleasant side effects of major retail is extremely commendable," Maness said.

Nearby residents cannot see Costco's loading docks or trash-compacting bins, he said.

"Those sorts of things with all the noise and the eyesore that would create ... are not an issue," Maness said. "Costco did far more due diligence as a company in activating the vision that was provided by city leadership."

Town Center resident and former real estate agent Mollie Francis said that if the development had to change, she preferred Costco over other large retailers.

Costco pays its part-time employees well and treats them better, she said.

"Because of that, because Costco is a little higher-end, probably the other businesses that will be coming into the area will be a little better," Francis said.

## 2014 and beyond

Ainbinder said Town Center's new In-N-Out Burger should open by late spring or early summer. The California chain's location is at the corner of Whitestone and Discovery boulevards.

Before then, several businesses will open in the strip building behind In-N-Out, he said. Residents will find Pieology Pizzeria, CareSpot clinic, Verts Kebap, Town Center Dental, Jersey Mike's Subs, Sushi Fever, Expert Nails & Spa and Zoës Kitchen in that building, Ainbinder said.

Julie Sondecker, head of marketing and communications at Verts Kebap, said the new restaurant will likely open in March.

Ainbinder said BJ's Brewhouse should start construction in February in time for a summer opening. Between BJ's and In-N-Out will be a third building that contains Chipotle Mexican Grill and a Sleep Number mattress store.

"That will complete what I will call Phase 1 of the project," Ainbinder said.

Later phases include what Ainbinder described as a high-end hotel behind the strip mall. A buyer is under contract but hasn't yet closed the purchase, Ainbinder said.

Home furnishing store At Home is planned to be built north of Costco along Toll 183A. The At Home name is part of Garden Ridge Pottery's rebranded furnishings and accessories store, Brewer said.

Other lots between Costco and Toll 183A are available for retail or restaurants, Ainbinder said.

The company is nearing deals with two restaurants at the northwest corner of Whitestone and Toll 183A. One is a chain Mexican restaurant, and the other is a fast-casual chicken restaurant built on a concept new to the Austin market, Ainbinder said.

Area residents to the northwest—many of them homeowners attracted by the original mixed-use concept—are waiting to see what results the new restaurants will bring, Maness said.

"Everybody likes the idea of the new restaurant in general," he said. "To balance that, they sometimes have concerns when they envision a highly popular restaurant in their backyard."

## Final outcomes

Bob Ingraham, member of Town Center HOA board, said the business boom starting with Costco led to neighborhood residents' concerns about traffic, though he said he doubts the additions will bring more traffic to Town Center's residential side.

So far Costco's customers have been coming to the store via main thoroughfares, not through the neighborhood, he said.

But already Main Street in Town Center has more traffic than the city expected, Maness said.

"The city has worked with [Town Center] to try to minimize problems and provide alternatives," he said. "The access in and out of that retail area was created with that in mind, even though one of the primary access points is off Discovery [Boulevard] within the entrance of our community."

Francis said she and other residents are most disappointed because of the lost vision of a denser, mixed-use development. She has lived in Cedar Park since 1995, and she and her husband were the first real-estate agents to buy a house in Town Center, Francis said.

"We thought that this was going to be the next step for Cedar Park to become a different kind of a place instead of a bedroom community," she said. "It was going to be a downtown community like what Austin has. ... We expected to be able to live here and maybe be able to retire here and maybe walk to a doctor's office, walk to a grocery store, walk to a theater."

The city's 1998 comprehensive plan ratified the mixed-use concept, creating for it a special zoning classification of downtown development. Plans called for Cedar Park's new City Hall to anchor the site, surrounded by walking paths.

But in 2007 city residents voted against a bond for a new City Hall at a cost of \$19.57 million. Soon after came the 2008 real-estate market crash, and developers grew skittish.

Brewer said mixed-use plans rarely succeed in practice, not only in Central Texas but statewide.

On Nov. 17, 2011, Ainbinder requested Cedar Park City Council approve a zoning change that would allow for Costco to be built. Ainbinder said the dense mixed-use vision would no longer work in Cedar Park after the economic slowdown.

"[Town Center] sat there undeveloped for 10 years," Brewer said. "There was an opportunity to revise it and get something that would work."

At the 2011 meeting, Town Center residents, including Francis, spoke against the proposed change.

Now some residents are considering moving, but others are open to the updated Town Center concept, Ingraham said.

"Considering we didn't get the original, I'm happy," he said. "It is what it is."

Maness said he remains optimistic about the new Town Center and the reasons for the change.

"[City officials] have been very proactive in seeking to achieve the best long-term outcome in harmony with the original vision," Maness said. "That's kind of a difficult thing to explain—in harmony," when it's not the original thing that you see. It's not violently different, even though some homeowners may feel that way."

- I like it because of the new shopping and dining options
- It's OK, but I wish there were more green spaces planned.
- I preferred the original plan, but at least the new businesses will bring sales and property tax dollars to the city.
- A walkable, residential-centered development would have been a much better fit

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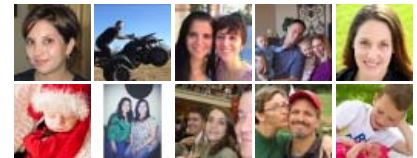
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## Coming soon

Costco opened in November as Cedar Park Town Center's anchor tenant. Developer Michael Ainbinder said more restaurants and shops are opening in 2014 and beyond.

### LEGEND

- Already built
- Under construction
- Planned

Source: The Ainbinder Company

