



Developer says Durbin Park mixed-use development will open in 2018

June 29, 2016

BY STUART KORFHAGE

The kind of development St. Johns County politicians and economic leaders have been coveting for years finally seems to be coming to fruition.

Durbin Park, a 1,600-acre, mixed-used development near the Duval County line, is going forward, according to a Wednesday announcement by Gate Petroleum Company and Gatlin Development Company.

The property, owned by Gate Petroleum Company, constitutes the largest contiguous area in St. Johns County planned for intensive commercial development. In fact, it accounts for about 70 percent of all the land zoned Commercial Intensive in the county.

The plan for Durbin Park includes an estimated 2.4 million square feet of retail, 2.8 million square feet of office space, 999 multi-family units and 350 hotel rooms once completed.

Durbin Park is located along Interstate 95 near the new State Road 9B-County Road 2209 interchange that is under construction.

The development has been planned for several years. It was previously referred to as Durbin Creek National LLC Urban Service Area.

The County Commission gave final approval to the land as an Urban Service Area in February 2015.

The first phase of the project, located on an 80-acre parcel west of the S.R. 9B-C.R. 2209 interchange, will include approximately 700,000 square feet of retail space anchored by at least three big box retailers.

Phase I is projected to open in the second quarter of 2018.

A development like Durbin Park has been sought after by the county because it is primarily a commercial endeavor that will expand the county's tax base without adding as much demand for services such as schools.

"The Durbin Park project is the culmination of years of effort between the County and GATE to bring high quality mixed-use development to St. Johns County," St. Johns County Administrator Michael Wanchick said in a release. "Not only will it provide convenient retail and office opportunities currently not available to St. Johns County residents, it will also help keep sales tax dollars local and support county-wide programs and services."

Phase II, located east of the S.R. 9B-C.R. 2209 interchange and adjacent to I-95, is projected to follow Phase I by 12 to 18 months and will include retailers, restaurants, entertainment components and Bass Pro Shops. The full Durbin Park development will be built out in four phases.

The plan to bring Bass Pro Shops to the area was first announced in 2012. It was originally planned to open in 2014, but that idea was contingent on the work around the S.R. 9B interchange being completed. The last phase (Phase 3) of the S.R. 9B work started in the fall of 2015. Phase 3 will connect C.R. 2209 (St. Johns Parkway) and a future connector road off Race Track Road called Peyton Parkway to I-95 and the rest of S.R. 9B in Jacksonville.

The first phase of the S.R. 9B work began in the summer of 2010. The new road from Philips Highway to I-295 East opened in September 2013.

Melissa Glasgow, director of economic development for the county, said she has already fielded several calls from consultants and company representatives for "large-scale office projects" expressing interest in the development. She said the interest stems from the location close to the new roads and proximity to desirable neighborhoods.

Those residential communities in the immediate area are mostly underserved.

"Our residents have often expressed a desire to have more shopping options in the county so they don't have to drive to Jacksonville for routine purchases," Glasgow said in an email to *The Record*. "Their patience will be rewarded with the number of new retail opportunities expected to locate closer to them in Durbin Park.

"From my perspective, this development represents a significant economic impact for our county and provides the opportunity to attract numerous new businesses, create thousands of jobs and increase our commercial tax base."

Ken Wilson, GATE's vice president in charge of real estate, said his company was looking at putting this development together more than a decade ago, but a downturn in the economy stalled the plans.

He said even back then a study was done that showed northern St. Johns County to be something of a “retail desert.”

“We’ve been excited, waiting for it to come,” Wilson said. “I know the county has been.”

Outside of Bass Pro Shops, Wilson said he wasn’t able to release any names of future tenants. However, he said they’re already reviewing site plans with interested parties.

“There are definitely going to be some of the major (retailers) that people need,” he said.

Having the newly constructed S.R. 9B and feeder roads as well as the Urban Service Area designation “sped the process up” for the development, Wilson said.

He said the commercial project should alter business in the northern part of St. Johns County and the southern portion of Duval.

“St. Johns will now experience Duval (residents) spending money in St. Johns,” Wilson said. “That’s a huge dynamic shift.”

The Gate property was previously part of the Cummer family trust that included 28,000 acres from the Durbin Park area all the way down to State Road 16.

Almost 22,000 acres was preserved as the Twelve Mile Swamp Wildlife Management Area. Most of what was left became Twin Creeks and Durbin Park.