

As Jacksonville grows, St. Johns County sees the commercial benefits

By Allison Colburn
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As Jacksonville experiences a surge in population growth and development sprawls north and south of the city center, an influx commercial projects have lined up in St. Johns County.

In just the past several days, plans have moved ahead in the area on two new specialty grocers, plans have been filed for more than 300,000 square feet of retail and Cinemark has announced it will [open a 12-screen movie theater in The Pavilion at Durbin Park](#).

"We're reacting to a market that is demanding more options," said [Chris Morgan](#), co-founder of Cantrell & Morgan, which, in a joint venture with Stiles Corp., is developing a grocery-anchored shopping center at the intersection of State Road 16 and International Golf Parkway.

That development, called the Shoppes at World Commerce Center, will include up to 70,000 square feet of retail and a specialty grocer. No grocer has signed a lease yet, but Morgan said he expects Cantrell & Morgan will have a commitment from a company in the first quarter of next year. The grocery store could be anywhere from 25,000 to 30,000 square feet, which, according to industry standards in the Jacksonville area, could accommodate a specialty grocer such as Earth Fare, Lucky's Market or Aldi.

Farther north, in Nocatee, a similar sized grocery store and 15,000 square feet of other retail are planned across Crosswater Parkway from Publix.

And on Wednesday, plans for "Durbin Creek Crossing," a 30-acre mixed-use development at the southwest corner of St. Johns Parkway and Race Track Road, were filed with the St. Johns River Water Management District. That project could see 250,000 square feet of commercial development and the construction of up to 386 multifamily units, according to site plans submitted by Southeast Investments Inc.

Morgan, whose company is also developing Gateway Village at Town Center near the St Johns Town Center, said the commercial growth in St. Johns County is just a natural progression in the Jacksonville metropolitan area's growth. As office buildings came online around the Florida 9B exit and residential developments sprung up nearby, this has created high demand for commercial development, he said.

With The Pavilion at Durbin Park adding around 700,000 square feet of commercial space near there as well, St. Johns County will look very different in the next few years.

As for the type of commercial development that goes into the area, Morgan said it's safe to assume that for the time being that the county won't see anything similar to the St. Johns Town Center. The types of high-end retailers that open locations there do so are not likely to open multiple locations in a metropolitan area the size of Jacksonville.

"To replicate something like that is so difficult," he said.

Instead, the county will see the types of stores, restaurants and entertainment options that people want close to home, such as grocery stores, home improvement stores and movie theaters, Morgan said.