



Phase I of what will be largest shopping center in the area set to open soon at Durbin Park

By Colleen Jones
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While the Ponce de Leon Mall struggles to hold on in the southern part of the county, the Pavilion at Durbin Park in North St. Johns is preparing to welcome shoppers when anchor tenant and first-to-operate Walmart opens next week.

Phase 1 of the massive 1,600-acre mixed-use complex will also include a Home Depot and a Cinemark movie theater, opening soon after Walmart and replacing the originally planned Sam's Club.

"With the completion of State Road 9B interchange and complementing the growth in St. Johns County, we are excited that our plans for this phase of our dynamic shopping and entertainment destination are coming to fruition," Frank Gatlin III, CEO and President of Gatlin Development, said in a news release Monday.

Durbin Park is being developed as a joint venture between Gate Petroleum Company and the Gatlin Development Company.

The remainder of the first phase is set to open in Spring 2019 — some 80 acres of space — and will include retail outlets like Verizon, Hand & Stone Spa, Great Clips, Five Below and Chase Bank, and restaurants such as Asian Fusion, Your Pie, Kazu Sushi, Salsa's Mexican and Keke's Breakfast Café.

About 80 percent of the space available in the first round of construction has been pre-leased, according to Kelly Pulignano and Stephanie McCullough, exclusive leasing agents with The Shopping Center Group.

A second stage of construction is still in the "initial planning stages," Pulignano said, but Bass Pro Shops is rumored to be signed on for Phase II.

Once completely built out, Durbin Park will be the largest shopping area in Northeast Florida, with nearly 2 million square feet of retail space.

With all the growth in the county's northwest, there has definitely been a void in retail and services such as banks, cleaners and mobile providers and Durbin Park will certainly provide those.

“St. Johns County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation but is currently very underserved on retail, restaurant and entertainment offerings. The unique offering at Durbin Park will service this growing residential population,” Pulignano said.

With both the new access between St. Johns and Duval counties provided by the opening of the 9B corridor, as well as visibility from Interstate 95, marketers hope it is also a destination for those in St. Augustine and Jacksonville, especially with amenities like a Ferris wheel and merry-go-round and an event lawn with video wall.

“We do expect to draw traffic from both St. Johns County and Duval County,” Pulignano said.

Plans also call for multi-family residential development, hotels and office space in the East Town Center section of the parcel, which in addition to the retail space will help keep jobs and economic growth in the county, according to Melissa Glasgow, St. Johns County’s director of economic development.

With Durbin Park so close to the Duval border, Glasgow said she is not surprised that developers decided to plant the center on the St. Johns side.

“St. Johns County is a financially sound government operation with a strong bond rating. We have the lowest overall tax structure in Northeast Florida and represent great value for those seeking investment opportunities,” Glasgow said. “With the recent actions by our County Commission to reduce impact fees on non-residential development and eliminate concurrency for commercial projects, we expect this trend to continue.”

Glasgow added that the development will also provide significant revenue in the form of the ad valorem and sales taxes that it is expected to generate.