Regency mall set for transformation into urban town center after Henrico supervisors OK rezoning

C. Suarez Rojas
Richmond Times-Dispatch - August 14, 2019

This rendering shows a plaza that Regency mall's owners plan to create at the Henrico County site. The county's Board of Supervisors approved rezoning to allow the property to become an urban town center with housing, retail, an outdoor aquatics center and a trampoline park.
COOPER CARRY ASSOCIATES

Henrico County's Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to approve a rezoning request that will allow developers to transform the decades-old Regency mall into an urban town center with up to 1,250 residences.

Although Regency's owners had said they wanted to save the mall after purchasing it for $13 million in 2015, poor vacancy rates and the steady decline of retail shopping nationwide have led to a change in vision.

With plans to build a NOVA indoor aquatics center and a Surge trampoline park in the former Macy's South and North buildings, respectively, the mall's new rezoning — urban mixed-use — will allow The Rebkee Co. and Thalhimer Realty Partners Inc. to build residential housing that had been restricted in the zoning district.

"If you don't bring rooftops and people to Regency, you'll never be able to support additional commercial development and you'll continue to see what you have today," said Jim Theobald, a lawyer for the developers.

In a public hearing and a community meeting earlier this summer, the development team and several nearby residents said they wanted to see the project succeed so that Regency does not fall into obscurity like other aging shopping malls struggling to compete against Amazon and other Online retailers.

"If we don't do something to make the changes that people want to see…shopping centers will just die," Henrico Supervisor Pat O'Bannon said in an interview before Tuesday's meeting.

Some residents, however, have raised concerns about the impact the development would have on traffic and schools.

The county's school system estimated that the development could yield more than 600 new students upon completion. But according to a Planning Department staff report on the Regency development, projections for other urban mixed-use districts — such as West Broad Village in Short Pump, anchored in part by a Whole Foods store — have significantly overestimated the impact on schools.

The report says existing roads should be able to accommodate an increase in traffic.

Rebkee and Thalhimer are planning to begin the project by building a 285-unit apartment complex that will replace the closed Sears building, which was purchased for $2.1 million this year.

The developers have said renting the apartments would cost about $1,200 to $1,500 per month.

O'Bannon said she is optimistic about Regency's future, noting the recent development of outparcel commercial buildings and road improvements that improved access and sightlines to the mall.

"Look at what they've done already," she said. "That's a prediction of what they're going to do. They're going to put a lot of money into this location."

While the developers now have more flexibility in deciding what else to build at Regency, Thalhimer principal Mark Slusher said there have been no discussions about potentially partnering with the country to created a new indoor sports complex there.

The county's tentative plans to build an arena with 12 basketball courts at Richmond Raceway were dashed this summer after negotiations with the raceway's owners fell through, leading to speculation about other locations.

In a separated vote Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors directed county staff to move forward with requesting new project proposals that must include a location that the county can easily acquire.

The county will ask the six development teams that bid on the project last year to submit new proposals.

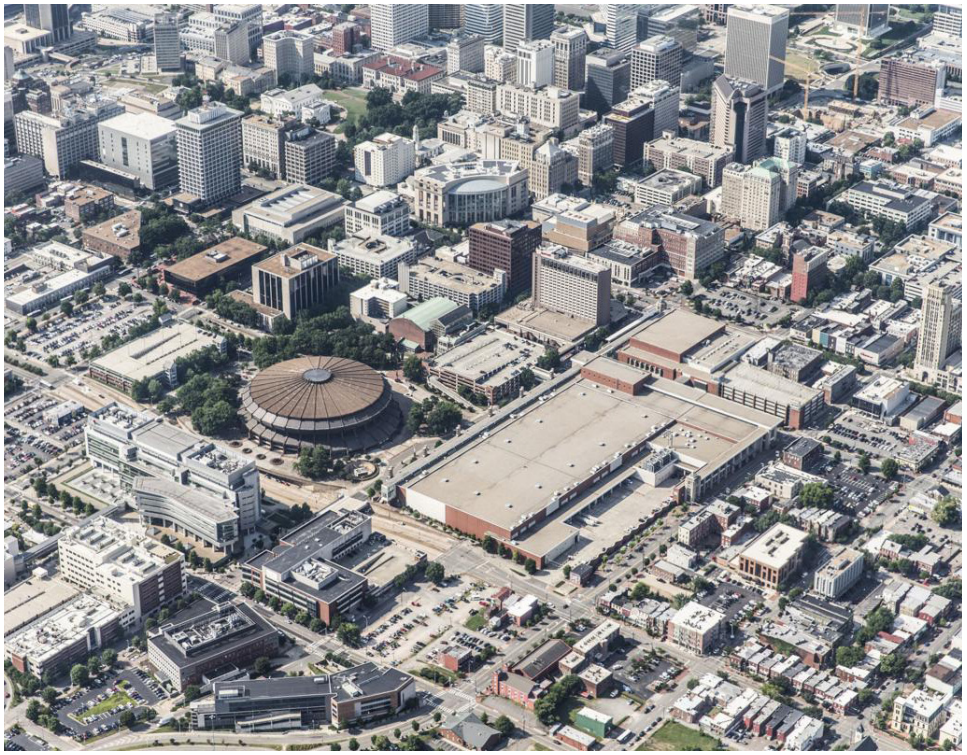
"Nobody has reached out to the development teams at this point," said county spokesman Ben Sheppard. "This next step will reopen those conversations, with the goal of bringing the board a proposal that incorporates a land agreement by late October."

County Manager John Vithoulkas said the county wants to own the land under a sports complex that would be leased to a private operator. He said the Board of Supervisors will review the submissions and recommendations for next steps on Oct. 22.

Richmond region ranks among top mid-sized metro areas for economic growth potential

Mark Robinson

Richmond Times Dispatch - July 28, 2019



Richmond scored high in the ranking for its ability to land corporate headquarters among cities with populations of 300,000 or less, as well as for its capacity to draw millennial job seekers.

2017, DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Richmond City Hall

RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

The Richmond region is among the best mid-size metropolitan areas in the country for economic growth potential.

Among peer cities, Richmond slotted fourth in the annual Metro Rankings Report published this month by Business Facilities magazine, a trade publication for site location consultants.

City leaders heralded the honor as an acknowledgment of the regions progress.

“Our city and our metro area’s high rankings in these core categories bode well for Richmond’s growth trajectory,” said Leonard Sledge, Richmond’s director of economic development, in a news release. “These rankings present an opportunity to learn from the innovative practices of higher-ranked cities and continually improve.”

The report, which the magazine releases annually, ranks metropolitan areas based on a slew of economic development factors, including gross domestic product, cost of living, and small business and startup climate.

Richmond trailed Grand Rapids, Mich.; Madison, Wis.; and Birmingham, Ala., in the mid-size category for economic growth potential. But it outranked the likes of the Jersey City, N.J.; Reno, Nev.; and Virginia Beach.

Earlier this month, Amazon, the Online, retail giant, announced it would open a new fulfillment center in South Richmond, bringing 150 new jobs. Richmond-based CoStar also said it would add 100 jobs in the city.

As of May, the city’s unemployment rate was 3% — on par with the statewide figure and slightly lower than the 3.6% rate nationally at the same point.

Richmond scored high among metro areas in the ranking for its ability to land corporate headquarters among cities with populations of 300,000 or less, as well as for its capacity to attract millennial job seekers, finishing second and seventh, respectively.

The Greater Richmond Partnership, a public-private economic development group touted the achievements, citing the seven Fortune 500 companies and three Fortune 1000 companies that call the region home.

“In the U.S. few regions our size have a higher concentration of Fortune headquarters than we do, and we’re honored to be ranked among the best locations,” said Jennifer Wakefield, the Partnership’s interim president and CEO.

In July, Virginia reclaimed the title of best state to do business in the annual CNBC ranking released. The last time the state cam in first was in 2011.

Apartments rise at CenterPointe, more in the pipeline

Jonathan Spiers
Richmond BizSense - July 22, 2019

The Abberly CenterPointe apartments on Brandermill Parkway.
PHOTOS BY JONATHAN SPIERS

The newest stretch of Brandermill Parkway is about to get busier with the addition of a years-in-the-making apartment development and more homes on the way.

HHHunt's Abberly CenterPointe apartments has started moving in residents in the first building completed at the under-construction complex, which is scheduled to be finished next month.

The 271-unit complex is taking shape on a 26-acre site along Brandermill Parkway north of Old Hundred Road, beside the Brandermill Woods retirement community and across the parkway from Bon Secours Drive that leads to The Memory Center Richmond and St. Francis Medical Center.

The complex's main building - a horseshoe-shaped structure with apartments enclosing a clubhouse and pool area - is set to open next, making available amenities that include a fitness center, game room, yoga room and business center. The central courtyard will include a pool house with bar and outdoor TV, a fire pit and grilling areas. Other amenities include a dog park and playground.

Units range from about 680 to just under 1,350 square feet, with one-, two- and three-bedroom floor plans. Monthly rents range from $1,100 to $2,077 and up, according to units listed on the property's website.

Announced 5 years ago, the $42 million project was delayed a couple years due to unit modifications and financing through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which is providing mortgage insurance through its rental and cooperative housing program.

In that time, the stretch of Brandermill Parkway was extended to connect with Charter Colony Parkway, creating a vital connector road for CenterPointe, Riverstone Properties' massive, 700-acre development along Route 288 northwest of Powhite Parkway.

2 More Projects

Farther north, at Brandermill Parkway's intersection with Charter Colony Parkway, land has been cleared and site work is underway on two more projects that will add more rooftops to the area: a second phase of the Colony at CenterPointe apartments, and a townhome development planned to total 90 lots.

The expansion of Colony at CenterPointe, renamed from Oxygen at CenterPointe when the 255-unit complex changed owners in late 2017, will add 192 additional apartments in the same style as the first phase, said Jeff Galanti, a principal with Riverstone. Robinson Development Group, the Norfolk-based firm that developed Oxygen in a joint venture with real estate firm Drucker & Falk, is on board again for phase two.

The additional units will fill an 11-acre tract that Robinson purchased in August 2017 for $5.47 million, according to Chesterfield County property records. The company sold the 18-acre first phase three months later to Atlanta-based Preferred Apartment Communities, a publicly traded real estate investment trust that purchased the apartments for $45.83 million.

Immediately east, site development is underway for a townhome community totaling 90 lots to be sold off to builders. Galanti said Riverstone has about a dozen firms on its list that are vying to build the townhomes, which will range from two to three stories and feature rear-loading garages with alley access. Galanti said lots are anticipated to start selling to builders in early fall.

"We're speaking to 10 to 12 builders," Galanti said. "They're all interested, because that is a product that's doing really well right now, and we think that's a good market for that kind of product."

The bulk of the homes will be three levels and front central boulevards, while units backing up to 288 will be two stories due to higher topography closer to the highway. The community, to be called CenterPointe Townes, also will include a clubhouse. Prices for the homes are expected to range from the upper $200,000s to lower $400,000s.

As part of the project, Riverstone is widening Charter Colony Parkway from two to four lanes from Brandermill Parkway to the intersection with Center Point Parkway and Lucks Lane. A multi-use path is also being installed along the east side of Charter Colony to connect with the developments.

Between the future townhomes and the existing CenterPointe Office Building beside Lucks Lane, Riverstone is planning a grocery-anchored retail center that Galanti expects to pick up interest with the additional homes and road widenings, which next year will include CenterPointe Parkway. A time-frame and design for the retail development will be user-driven, he said.