

## Mixed-use development to replace the former Cinemark Theater near Barton Creek Square Mall

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By Tiffany Young

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AUSTIN — Austin City Council gave the go-ahead Aug. 4 for developer Cypress Real Estate Advisors to begin construction on Tarlton 360 Townhomes, a 16.24-acre, 707,414-square-foot mixed-use development. The development is planned at the site of the vacant Cinemark Movie Theater adjacent to Barton Creek Square Mall at Walsh Tarlton Lane and Capital of Texas Hwy.



## Tarlton 360 Townhomes layout by phases



To begin work, Cypress needed the Council's approval on its site plan and an extension on the length of time for construction from three to 10 years.

Originally, the plan was to have an office complex without a housing component, but after discussions with neighbors, the developers decided a mixed-use project was more appropriate.

"The site is a wonderful piece of real estate, with certain demographics in the area," said John Burnham, Cypress Real Estate Advisors vice president of investments. "There are obviously lots of benefits in putting the site into active use, rather than having it be an old, shuttered movie theater."

He said that although Cypress Real Estate has security on-site, vagrant activity on the grounds is a liability for the property owner and surrounding buildings because of possible fires, which can be especially dangerous during the current drought.

### **Just a phase**

Burnham said the project would come in three phases, beginning with 86 townhomes, then 140 condominium units within two buildings and ending with office and retail space. Burnham expects to break ground by the end of the year and estimates the vertical building in Phase 1 to begin around the third quarter of 2012.

Dick Clark Architecture, Longaro and Clarke civil engineers and TBG Landscape Architects are designing the project, which has 8,300 square feet of retail, 3,500 square feet of dining and 75,819 square feet of office and a parking garage in addition to its residential real estate.

### **Project delays**

The development began with unique setbacks since the land is within the Barton Springs Recharge Zone, the groundwater portion of the Edwards Aquifer that feeds into Barton Springs. Passed in 1992, the Save Our Springs Ordinance would have kept the project from being developed at all if it were not for a 2007 Barton Springs Zone Redevelopment Amendment, sometimes referred to as the Leffingwell Ordinance, that provides an exception to SOS when dealing with redeveloping a property. A rezoning request for the project, approved in August 2010, made this project the first to be approved under the amended SOS.

In its application, Longaro and Clarke sent a letter to Austin's Watershed Protection and Development Review Department stating that the project would not increase existing impervious cover—area covered by impenetrable materials such as asphalt, concrete, brick and stone—and that irrigation/retention ponds for the development would improve the water quality more than what is required.

Previously, if a developer wanted to redevelop land within the recharge zone, it would have only been able to build up to 20 percent impervious cover.

Burnham said the original ordinance "disincentivizes anyone from ever wanting to redevelop a site."

While Cypress will be developing more than 20 percent of the site, it is still increasing the amount of open space on the site.

### **Neighborhood against project scope**

Some of the residents within the South Bee Caves Woods Neighborhood Association, Tarlton 360 Townhomes' closest neighbors, are not keen on the development.

Burnham said in February 2009, Cypress met with the nearby neighborhood associations and got support from SBCWNA, Hill Country Estates and Stoneridge neighborhoods. But when new leadership was appointed to SBCWNA in 2010, the leaders rescinded their letter of support.

Burnham said complaints from the neighborhood covered traffic and safety concerns to wanting a full commercial project.

“We were shocked the support was pulled. I also feel this project is light years better than the preliminarily approved site, which was a large office/retail project that generated more than twice the traffic our project generates,” Burnham said.

A traffic impact analysis showed there would not be a large increase in traffic to the area—anticipating approximately 4,100 trips per day among its three driveways, one from Capital of Texas Hwy. and two from Walsh Tarlton. It also showed the original Cinemark project had been approved for about 1,000 additional automobiles driving along Walsh Tarlton than the estimates for this project, but that seems high to some of the residents.

“I don’t think we ever saw 4,000 a day. When you look at [more than] 200 townhomes and condominiums, that’s the traffic that will be coming down Walsh Tarlton,” SBCWNA President Lynn Harrison-David said.

Jacobs Engineering Group Inc. was retained by Cypress Real Estate Group to analyze the Walsh Tarlton and Capital of Texas Hwy. Traffic Impact Analysis developed by HDR Engineering Inc. to ensure the study was accurate.

“It was clear that even if a larger percentage go north on Walsh Tarlton, the roadway is appropriately sized to handle that traffic, even if a significantly larger amount of traffic went north on Walsh Tarlton than projected in the TIA,” Burnham said.

Diane Pingree, a resident of SBCWNA and the secretary for the association, said she is not against development at that location but feels the project scope is too large.

“We know something is going to be developed there, but it’s the density and extent they are wanting to put in there. They have in mind a commercial building and 226 townhomes and condos—we just think that’s way too dense for this neighborhood,” Pingree said.

The developer has agreed to improve the existing driveways, make suggested traffic improvements, reserve 15 parking spaces for carpooling vehicles and three spaces for the City of Austin car-sharing program.

### **Going green**

Because the project is within the Hill Country Roadway Corridor, Tarlton 360 Townhomes needed special approval from Austin City Council to construct buildings more than 40 feet in height, which would obstruct natural views. In order to get an exception, the developers added a scenic vista—which will be open to the public— atop one of the buildings overlooking the Barton Creek Greenbelt. The highest additional building will be 53 feet, 10 feet below the height of the former Cinemark building.

Cypress also agreed to give Austin about \$147,000 for parkland dedication and is committed to participating in Austin Energy's Green Building program.

"The environmental components of the project are particularly compelling," said John Burnham, Cypress Real Estate Advisors vice president of investments.

On-site there is currently a sand filtration pond that removes about 57 percent of pollutants from the site. After redevelopment, Cypress Real Estate will improve the sand filtration pond to a water quality pond, which will filter 90 percent of the pollutant load before it runs into the Edwards Aquifer.

"Some people don't realize how important that is—soil is the best filtration you can have for water before it goes to the aquifer, and because we're before the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, it's critically important here," Burnham said.