

# Stirling Covington center expansion project planned

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A 90-acre combination office park, retail and restaurant development east of the Stirling Covington shopping center on the south side of Interstate 12 is being developed, said Jimmy Maurin, chairman of Stirling Properties.

The expansion project will contain office buildings similar to the Northpark Office Park development off U. S. Highway 190. They will be separated from the retail and restaurant areas by a four-lane landscaped boulevard in the style of Northpark Office Park, Maurin said.

Maurin said more than half of the proposed development will be dedicated to office buildings and corporate space of 500,000 square feet, with a possibility of including an executive hotel with meeting areas. The anticipated retail and restaurant development would be about 250,000 square feet, Maurin said.

Although there are more than 100 commercial listings available in western St. Tammany Parish, most are only for 500 to 2,000 square feet of office space, said Lizby Eustis, a commercial real estate agent with Stirling. This means there is still a demand for corporate office space requiring larger amounts of square footage because the spaces in existing office parks are leased, she said.

Maurin believes the interchange being constructed on I-12 just east of Louisiana Highway 21 is crucial to the continued economic development and growth of western St. Tammany Parish. With the conversion of the former rest area into access and exit ramps for I-12, along with the turnaround, the entire area will be accessible without adding more traffic to the current interchange of La. 21 and I-12 at exit 59.



Jimmy Maurin

In addition to the 90-acre office park, the Stirling Covington shopping complex is expanding south of Kirkland's Home. The retail area expansion of 50,000 square feet currently has no tenants, but clearing of land for infrastructure improvements has already begun. Belk is also expanding in the center, adding an additional 40,000 square feet to its existing 80,000 square feet.

Maurin said the entire center is doing well. He said Target did not initially want a second location on the Northshore, having one already in Slidell. However, Maurin said the store in Covington is now one of Target's top producers nationally.

The entire area is being developed in cooperation with Christwood, a senior citizen residential facility.

In fact, Maurin said all the developers in the area are providing roads connecting the various areas so that residents of Christwood will have access to all areas without the necessity of accessing either La. 21 or I-12.

Other developments in the southeastern quadrant of La. 21 and I-12 include a 200-unit high end executive apartment complex and two residential developments, one by Stirling and one by Bennett Brothers.

Despite current recent retail developments in the area, most notably Colonial Properties' Nord du Lac, Maurin is optimistic about Stirling's developments. "There is more than enough retail demand for everyone," he said.

"Colonial is a good company with quality developments, and I commend them for their perseverance in pursuing their project," Maurin said. He also said that the addition of Barnes & Nobles to the Nord du Lac center will not mean the closing of the Mandeville store.

"Barnes and Nobles has assured me they intend to keep the Mandeville store, at least for the remainder of their seven- to eight-year lease," said Maurin. Many of the stores in the Mandeville location are rumored to be signing with Nord du Lac, although nothing has been made public.

Maurin said many of his tenants will stay in Mandeville because they realize the area is becoming more of a two-store market, meaning that customers in Mandeville will not necessarily travel to Covington to shop and vice versa. He said some stores will move to Covington, some will remain only in Mandeville, and others will have two stores.

Maurin also said he feels the next wave of growth for west St. Tammany will be westward from La. 21 toward Louisiana Highway 1077 and Louisiana Highway 1085.