

Mid-City retail site inks tenants
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Developers hope to break ground in a few months on a new Winn-Dixie-anchored shopping center that will eliminate the last pocket of blight along a now-thriving North Carrollton Avenue commercial corridor.

An official from **Stirling Properties** said Tuesday that the company has selected Donahue Favret Contractors Inc. to build the Mid-City Market, which in addition to the 53,000-square-foot supermarket will include a mix of smaller retail outlets.

Stirling expects to close on financing for the more than \$25 million project in early December and begin construction in January, said Townsend Underhill, the firm's vice president of development.

Underhill said about 91,000 of the 107,000 square feet of space at the site has been leased.

In addition to Winn-Dixie, Office Depot, Jefferson Feed, Verizon, Felipe's Taqueria, Pinkberry frozen yogurt, Five Guys burgers and fries, and Pei Wei Asian diner have signed on as tenants. Plans call for the site to be open by Thanksgiving 2012.

City Councilwoman Susan Guidry, who has been working closely with the development team, said Stirling intends to submit its proposal to the City Planning Commission this week. Guidry said the timeline being discussed is ambitious but doable.

Guidry commended Stirling officials for working with the Carrollton Design Review Committee, a citizens' group that advises City Hall on commercial development in the area.

She said that commitment to work with the neighborhood could help the developer move the project through the City Hall review process more quickly.

Stirling has signed a lease with Winn-Dixie for a supermarket modeled after its store on Louisiana 21 in Covington, which opened in February 2010 as a national prototype for the Jacksonville, Fla., company.

That location has stained concrete floors, high ceilings, soft lighting and a 30-foot open-air covered entryway with produce displayed farmers-market-style in open boxes. The store also has a yogurt bar, olive bar, salad bar, wing bar, and a seafood case that's about twice the size of a regular store's, as well as nuts and dried fruit sold by the pound.

The grocery store will be set at the back of the Bohn Ford site at 401 N. Carrollton Ave.

An additional 55,000 square feet of retail space will fill out the rest of the property, with Office Depot, Jefferson Feed and one as-yet-unnamed business targeted for the site of the former Harry's Ace Hardware building on 301 N. Carrollton Ave.

While the shuttered car dealership will be torn down to make way for the supermarket, Guidry said the current plan calls for developers to renovate the building that housed the hardware store.

The proposed Lafitte Greenway, a 3-mile-long park that would connect Armstrong Park on the edge of the French Quarter to Canal Boulevard where Lakeview meets Mid-City, would run alongside the proposed Winn-Dixie and the main part of the development. Several retail sites would face the greenway.

The stretch of North Carrollton between Canal Street and Orleans Avenue has rebounded since Hurricane Katrina, with a bank and other small businesses joining several new restaurants and a few established eateries that reopened at their old sites.

The Mid-City Market site is the only dormant tract along the strip.

Winn-Dixie had a Mid-City location before the storm, but the site became a Home Depot after Katrina.

The new store will be directly across the street from Rouses. Before Katrina, there were three grocery stores in the area: Winn-Dixie; Sav-A-Center, which was bought out by Rouses in 2007; and a Robert Fresh Market at the corner of Canal and Carrollton, which is now a Walgreens.

The Mid-City architecture firm VergesRome is handling the design for Stirling Properties.

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