

https://www.gwinnettdailypost.com/local/snellville-building-its-heart-with-towne-center-project/article_34380432-0560-11ec-94cf-0f50534d5e49.html

FEATURED

URGENT

Snellville building its 'heart' with Towne Center project

By Curt Yeomans curt.yeomans

[@gwinnettdailypost.com](https://www.gwinnettdailypost.com)

Aug 29, 2021



Construction crews work on a stairway tower for luxury apartments that are being built on Oak Road in Snellville as part of the Grove at Towne Center development. The Grove project is designed to create a downtown area for Snellville.

Staff Photo: Curt Yeomans

If Snellville were to be compared to a body, then city officials are working on creating the thing that will give it life.

A heart. Or municipal version of a heart: a downtown.

That is what Snellville officials see as being the driving force behind The Grove at Towne Center project that broke ground earlier this year. The project will see the creation of a downtown district within walking distance of City Hall, with restaurants, retail, event space, green space, a new library and luxury apartments.

“Snellville has never had a heart, a center and that was the vision all along: to build a town center, a downtown (and) base it, as much as possible, in a lot of our history,” City Manager Butch Sanders said.

As far as development in Snellville is concerned, The Grove at Towne Center is the project that city officials are solely focused on right now. The city is working with CASTO and MidCity Real Estate Partners on the \$85 million, 18-acre project.

Although construction is just now starting, the Grove at Towne Center project has been in the works in Snellville for about two decades. The first phase is between North and Oak roads, Clower Street and Wisteria Drive, and it is expected to open in late fall 2022.

The project is, in a way, Snellville’s version of what other Gwinnett cities, such as Suwanee, Sugar Hill, Duluth, Lilburn and Lawrenceville, have done to either expand and redevelop existing downtown areas or to build a downtown that did not exist before.

“I think it gives the city the downtown identity that it’s never had,” Mayor Barbara Bender said. “You know, the center of Snellville, the downtown was always the intersection at 78 and 124 and, of course, that’s gone and paved over, so the first thing we get out of it is a downtown identity.

“And, I think economic development-wise, it’s just going to be huge having a high quality project, or a high quality area in southern Gwinnett County.”

The biggest visible sign of what is to come at the site, aside from the large dirt patch that now exists, is the foundations of the more than 250 luxury apartment complex. One of the staircase towers for the complex is rising out of the ground near Oak Road.

Eventually, the development will have the apartments with a parking deck, two free standing restaurants, a two-story market and events center with restaurants and event space, at least two

buildings with commercial space and a green space with a small performing stage that can supplement the Snellville Town Green and host smaller events.

The city is also planning to put in a splash pad, as well as digital kiosks that visitors can play games on, at the green space. The green space is in addition to the first phase of a walking trail that be part of The Grove.

The City Council awarded a \$606,367 contract to Tri Scapes Inc. this past week to build the second phase of the trail. The second phase which pickup where the first phase will end, at the corner of Oak Road and U.S. Highway, and continue it south to Briscoe Park.

There were also be the new two-story, 44,000-square-foot Elizabeth Williams library branch that the city is working with Gwinnett County to have built at the site. Pre-construction meetings on the library were still taking place this past week.

It will be different from other libraries that Gwinnett has been partnering with cities to build in recent years in that it will have a business center with co-working space for start-ups and entrepreneurs on its second floor.

“That should be under construction, hopefully within the next two or three months,” Sanders said.

But, the new library and business center will not be the only thing that is unique at The Grove at Towne Center.

Sanders said the market and event center, which will be located next to the library, will feature a different take on the food hall concept with about 10 restaurants.

“The concept that we’re looking at is really unique,” Sanders said. “It’s a multiple restaurant, chef-driven concept like a food hall, but there’s table top service.

“It’s not where you go around to 10 different food vendors and order your food and try to find a seat. This is where you come into a very nice environment with table top seating and you’re own server, you’re seated and you’re given a menu with 10 different (restaurant) options and you can order, or anyone at the table can order, from any of those 10 and your food comes out.”

The market area will also include a social bar area.

There will be 16,000 to 17,000-square-feet of restaurant space on the first floor and another 16,000 to 17,000-square-feet of event space on the second floor.

Sanders said the event space is much needed in Snellville.

“We just don’t have that now,” the city manager said. “It’s like when we have the Gwinnett Municipal folks, when we host all of the other cities in the county, we either go to Summit Chase or we do it at our community room.

“So, this will just be a really great, and I think widely used, second floor of that space.”

Meanwhile, the apartments are something different for Snellville. There already is one older apartment complex in the city, but the city manager said it is not centrally located in the town.

The luxury apartments that are being built at The Grove are, as a result, something new for Snellville in the eyes of city officials.

“We need a bigger selection of housing choices, not only for young working people who aren’t ready to invest in a home,” Sanders said. “There are a lot of empty nesters who are looking at these apartments and hoping there are going to be townhome/condo opportunities in this area because the amenities and the availability of things to do and places to meet are just attracting a lot of interest.”

And, the city manager also said the response from businesses interested in occupying the two planned commercial buildings, with both retail and office space, has been strong.

“The demand has been such that they’re already looking at putting a third (commercial) building in there,” Sanders said.

Meanwhile, Snellville officials said The Grove at Towne Center to be the first stage in bigger aspirations to redevelop the center of the city.

Sanders pulled out a vision and master plan map from 2016 that shows redevelopment, including new housing options — not necessarily more apartments — and other mixed-use options along U.S. Highway 78 on both sides of Scenic Highway.

The map also shows development south of Highway 78, filling in spaces bordered by that highway, as well as State Route 124 and the Henry Clower Boulevard loop.

“The hope is to attract more investment and expand out from (The Grove at Towne Center),” Sanders said. “Especially residential. These luxury apartments are great to have, but we know that other people are looking at building town homes, potential redevelopment of some of our older centers.

“And, we believe, eventually, that other neighborhoods will redevelop around our new downtown.”

Bender pointed out the city’s plans do not call for developing previously undeveloped land.

“It’s not like we’re taking fields and countryside and converting it into something urban,” the mayor said. “This is actually stuff that’s been developed. It was developed in the 70’s and the 80’s, and it wasn’t always great, quality development in the long haul so we’re really taking some of those areas that have just kind of declined and redeveloping them.”

But, more immediate is the Phase II portion of The Grove at Town Center, which is located across Wisteria Drive from the part that is currently under construction. Sanders teased that a major announcement about plans for that site is expected to be made within the next two months or so.

“We’re very close to announcing a multimillion dollar investment by the private sector in Phase II,” he said.

And, there is also interest in properties located between Oak Road and Highway 78, with ideas ranging from expanding Snellville Plaza to Oak Road to building a boutique hotel adjacent to The Grove at Towne Center.

All, in all, Snellville officials are seeing a lot of interest in future redevelopment around the still unfinished “heart” of the city.

“So far, it has done everything that we were hoping it would do: attract a lot of interest, a lot of future investment,” Sanders said.

What is in The Grove at Towne Center Phase I

Here are the amenities that will be available in the first phase of The Grove at Towne Center in Snellville:

- A new two-story Elizabeth Williams library branch with 44,000 square feet of space in a building that will include a business center with co-working space for young businesses on the second floor.
- A two-story market and event center with 16,000-17,000 square feet of space on each floor and about 10 chef-driven restaurants on the first floor with event space on the second floor.
- About 250 luxury apartments built around a parking deck
- Two 3,500-square-foot buildings that will house restaurants.
- At least two commercial buildings with office and retail space and about 6,000 to 7,000-square feet of space in each building.
- A just under one acre green space with some trees that were on the site before construction performed, as well as interactive kiosks, a bench wall, a pavilion and a splash pad.
- A trail head for a walking trail that will be located along Wisteria Drive and pass through the cemetery next to Snellville City Hall before ending at U.S. Highway 78. A second phase that the Snellville City Council recently approved will continue the trail across U.S. Highway and end at Briscoe Park.

Curt Yeomans

I'm a Crawford Long baby who grew up in Marietta and eventually wandered to the University of Southern Mississippi for college. Earned a BA in journalism (double minor in political science and history). Previously worked in Florida and Clayton County.