



Sembler's Town rolls toward summer opening

by David Pendered

January 23, 2009

A movie theater, shops and restaurants, and 659 luxury apartments are scheduled to begin opening this summer and autumn at Town/Brookhaven, the big redevelopment on Peachtree Road near Oglethorpe University.

Sembler, the master developer whose local offices are in Sandy Springs just west of Brookhaven, is moving the project forward despite the recession.

The site was busy this month as workers completed the apartments. Heavy earthmovers were grading land on the west side of the 54-acre tract while surveyors guided their moves. A crane was on site, one of the few left standing in the Buckhead-Brookhaven corridor other than Ben Carter's mixed-use development at Peachtree and Pharr roads, Streets of Buckhead.

Sembler's Brookhaven project is behind the schedule announced at the groundbreaking Oct. 18, 2007. At that comparatively robust time, the entire project was scheduled to be completed by late this spring. In reaction to the cooling market, Sembler reduced the amount of commercial space by 20 percent, from 600,000 square feet to 483,000 square feet. Still, that's more than half the size of Phipps Plaza.

Town/Brookhaven now is slated to open in phases, with its major components opening by the end of this year, Sembler spokesman Nick Gold said. The big-box retail space is to include a grocery store, a theater that will serve chef-designed meals, other major retailers to be announced within a month, and 30,000 square feet of office space.

In early 2010, the Columns Group plans to deliver about 20 town houses priced from \$650,000, said Matthew Coutu, the company's development coordinator.

In a nod to the ailing economy, Gold emphasized the jobs to be created as much as the amenities the development will bring to the area.

"This project is moving forward and is going to be a fantastic new community coming out of the ground for the Brookhaven community, with shopping and dining and residences all rolled into one," Gold said. "It also will provide hundreds of new jobs for people, whether as retail employees, management types in the businesses and restaurant personnel. It runs the whole gamut in a very pedestrian and highly landscaped environment."

The Brookhaven community is eager for the project to open, said Frank Clementi, the president of the Historic Brookhaven Neighborhood Association.

Clementi said he and members talked about the project at their Jan. 14 meeting. The organization represents about 850 homes, he said.

"The general consensus was that everyone is excited to have new retail and new restaurants to go to, a feeling that it's going to help the whole area of Brookhaven," Clementi said. "Their concerns were about the potential increase in traffic, increased cut-through traffic through historic Brookhaven. Some were concerned about water runoff."

He said Sembler officials have lived up to the promises made in negotiations with the

association during the rezoning of the property in 2006. Sembler originally proposed a midrise condo tower, which the neighborhood vehemently opposed. Area residents also wanted more green space in the development.

"Sembler hosted us in their office, they listened to our concerns, they showed concern and willingness to work with the neighborhood, and that should be highlighted," Clementi said. "They have to do what they have to do. But they definitely showed support and concern for the neighborhood."

Coutu said the Columns Group thinks a strong market remains for Brookhaven town houses priced from the mid-\$600,000s. The company plans to start with 20 of the 55 houses it intends to build. Their British Romanesque exterior reflects that of Oglethorpe University, he said.

"We're hoping the market is going to turn around, and there's a good bit of excitement over what Sembler's doing there," Coutu said. "We think there's still a market there."

Ken Bernhardt said projects such as Town/Brookhaven tend to be successful because they capitalize on the critical mass of the overall development. Bernhardt is an assistant dean and professor of marketing at Georgia State University's J. Mack Robinson College of Business.

"Malls discovered this 50 years ago, that by clustering a number of like stores, you create a district that becomes a destination," he said. "Think of what Atlantic Station is trying to do with its movie theater, bars and restaurants, and shopping. It's a destination where it is much easier for the shops to survive than if each were there by itself."

A snapshot of Town/Brookhaven

Residential

- The Goodwynn at Town/ Brookhaven – 372 apartments ranging from 790 to 1,540 square feet. Developer: Lincoln Properties. Opening late summer.
- The Alexan at Town/Brookhaven – 287 apartments ranging from 640 to 1,277 square feet. Developer: Trammell Crow Residential. Opening late summer.
- Name to be determined – 310 apartments, one and two bedrooms. Developer: Fairfield Residential. Opening early 2010.
- Savoy at Town/Brookhaven – 55 town houses. Developer: Columns Group. About 20 units opening early 2010.

Commercial

- A total of 483,000 square feet to open beginning late this summer. A key attraction will be Cinebistro, a movie theater with seven screening rooms geared for people 21 and older and serving a menu prepared by chef Alan Lake. In addition, there will be dining choices ranging from white-tablecloth to quick-serve restaurants, with an emphasis on local, chef-driven restaurants.

Source: Sembler