

Marin City leaders hope Target will reinvigorate shopping center and area

Leaders hope Target store will revive prospects for shopping center and area

By Mark Prado, Marin Independent Journal

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With the announcement of retail juggernaut Target as a new tenant, there is hope again for the Marin Gateway Shopping Center to bring jobs, revenue and energy to Marin City and Southern Marin.

“Target will be the centerpiece of a redevelopment,” said Terrence Tallen, as he strolled the center last week, discussing plans for the future. He is partner and principal with the Southern California-based Gerrity Group, which owns Gateway.

“Everyone is stoked about Target. People are thrilled. I would call this a game changer,” he said.

The center is 82 percent occupied. Tallen said he thinks the center’s storefronts will be fully occupied in two years — and a destination for shoppers and the community.

Target signed a lease two weeks ago to put a store in Gateway in the building previously occupied by Best Buy, with a goal of opening by March 1, 2017.

The new store will be one of Target’s smaller “flexible format” customized stores that cater to the clientele of the area, Target officials said. Target stores — such as those in Novato and San Rafael — operate in larger spaces of at least 130,000 square feet.

Target promises groceries, something the community lacks in the immediate area. The store also will bring more than 100 new jobs, Tallen said.

“You will have well-priced, healthy food,” Tallen said. “It will fill a lot of other categories, too. We look at this as a catalyst to propel this into a first-class shopping center.”

Marin City residents have heard the same optimism before for the center, only to see little result.

The center, which has 182,000 square feet of retail space and 900 parking spots, opened in 1997 as part of the Marin City USA economic redevelopment project that also included new townhomes. Though the center brought the prospect of new economic vitality for Marin City, it has left many in the community of 3,500 disappointed.

Black-owned and -operated businesses were to be part of the economic mix at the center, but they didn’t take hold and closed. Tenants came and went, the center ownership changed hands, and the plaza has struggled to find momentum in its first two decades.

That left locals to reflect on its beloved flea market, which was discontinued when the shopping center opened. A fixture for more than two decades, the flea market generated about \$500,000 annually for the Marin City Community Services District, which poured part of the money back into community programs.

“It has been a disappointment,” said Kate Sears, Marin County supervisor who represents Marin City and Southern Marin, of the shopping center.

But she is hopeful the arrival of Target will bring in other stores, such as Trader Joe’s, and further boost the shopping center while building on momentum in Marin City created by the reopened Rocky Graham Park, a new gym and plans to rebuild the community center.

“There are a lot of good things happening in Marin City,” Sears said. “It feels like things are on a good trajectory. I’m feeling upbeat and optimistic.”

Melissa Cadet, executive director of the Marin City Community Development Corp. — which provides career training, among other services — sees Target as a positive for the center and community.

“It will boost jobs, not only in Marin City, but the region as well,” she said. “Target is a strong anchor tenant at the center, which has been at a stalemate in the past. It will be a nice way to showcase Marin City, which has changed. It is more of a melting pot.”

One of the draws of the new Target will be its food selection. Target’s store will offer produce, basic dry foods, dairy and frozen food, as well as an expanded selection of convenience foods in snacks, beverages and candy.

“Our expanded fresh food layout is one way we’ve evolved our store design,” said Kristy Welker, Target spokeswoman.

Royce McLemore, a longtime Marin City resident and member of the Community Services District board, said she does not think Target will fulfill the community’s grocery needs alone.

“We need a full-blown grocery store as was promised from the beginning of Gateway,” she said.

Tallen is working to bring Trader Joe’s to Gateway to join the existing Ross Dress For Less, West Marine, CVS Pharmacy, Outback Steakhouse and others.

To that end, he has hired a San Rafael architect to draw up plans for a 12,000-square-foot building at the old Dollar Tree space. That store closed in January.

“We are putting our best foot forward with Trader Joe’s,” he said.

Other plans call for a “Starbucks on steroids” expanded site for the community and people coming off Highway 101. Restaurants are also in the works. More tentative plans call for a Marin welcome center and days with a farmers market and live bands.

“We are the first things visitors and commuters see when they come over the Golden Gate Bridge,” said Tallen, scanning the plaza. “We want to make it special.”

