

Multiuse district to further develop Lower Kirby
By Stephen Garcia
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A \$300 million master-planned and multiuse center known as the Ivy District is slated for construction in Pearland and is expected to further the development of the growing Ivy District Lower Kirby Urban Center.

Lower Kirby—an area of Pearland near the intersection of Beltway 8 and Hwy. 288—was designated by the city as a priority for development in its 2013 comprehensive plan. As a result the area attracted new businesses, including Dover Energy and Merit Medical, which opened in 2014. China-based company Modern Green Development—which is developing the Ivy District—said Pearland and the Lower Kirby Urban Center was an attractive location to construct its first project in the United States.

“The Pearland site was chosen for a variety of reasons, including the robust Houston and Texas economies, Pearland’s growth over the last decade and proximity to downtown, the Museum District, Texas Medical Center and Hobby Airport,” said Donald Hayes, marketing specialist for Modern Green Development.

Lower Kirby Urban Center

The Ivy District—which is expected to be complete within six to 10 years—is designed to be a mixed-use, walkable 48.5-acre center that features high-end retail and restaurants, offices, a conference center, modern hotel, upscale residential and 18 acres of dedicated green space.

The vision for the Ivy District also aligns with the city’s desire to have an area that is attractive for young professionals and technology workers to live and work.

“[Lower Kirby] is an ideal location for a high-visibility, walkable type of community where there could be a lot of good opportunities for nightlife and small conventions,” Pearland Mayor Tom Reid said. “We’re beginning to be a very cosmopolitan suburb of Houston, so we really need something [like the Ivy District] in our community to add to our quality of life.”

Already the site of Bass Pro Shops and Dover Energy—both 150,000-square-foot facilities—Lower Kirby will get an added economic boost of more than 900 jobs and \$3 million in tax revenue upon completion of the Ivy District, according to Modern Green Development.

Ivy District

Pearland City Council approved the Ivy District project in September after a successful zoning change.

The plan for the Ivy District is in its implementation phase as Modern Green continues to create development agreements, analyzes the surrounding market for additional development opportunities and completes the necessary traffic impact and drainage studies, Hayes said.

Construction of the future development will be done in two phases, he said.

Phase 1 of construction—which includes public space along Clear Creek, a 150-room hotel with a 15,000-square-foot conference center, offices, retail and 575 residential units—is expected to begin in

the fourth quarter of 2015. The approximately 15 acres of recreational space alongside Clear Creek will be completed before the first building is occupied and will include amenities, such as trails, picnic areas and pavilions. The remaining residential and retail space will be part of Phase 2.

Plans include more than 800,000 square feet of retail, office and hotel space, plus a 10,000-square-foot convention center at the base of a residential unit. The Ivy District will also feature a retirement community, which will have various assisted living options, rehabilitation and medical services, and restaurant and entertainment spaces aimed at senior citizens. The retirement center will be built during Phase 1.

Development issues

Development in Lower Kirby does, however, face some challenges that Modern Green will likely have to address. In 2009 the Pearland Economic Development Corporation and the city selected Gateway Planning Group—a town-planning, transportation design and economic development company—to create a comprehensive infrastructure plan for the Lower Kirby Urban Center.

“The EDC hired Gateway Planning to look at infrastructure and land use and try to bring everything together,” PEDC President Matt Buchanan said. “[We wanted] to see how we could best work with the biosector and existing landowners over time to develop the district in phases and be responsive to [businesses] as they came in. So far I think we’ve been real successful with that plan.”

A lack of thoroughfares and drainage issues were some of the early challenges identified within the district. Those problems are compounded because the area’s land has multiple owners, city officials said.

“Besides [Kirby Drive] there’s really no roads in the district,” Buchanan said. “And you have multiple fragmented property owners, so it’s not like one developer can come in and just buy one piece of property. You’d have to buy probably 60 pieces of property to carry out any type of development plan.”

Due to these factors, the Lower Kirby area needs to be built in stages, Buchanan said. Gateway Planning came up with a cooperative plan to address the problem with drainage.

“Our planning process was to help bring all the landowners together and to create a strategy to invest in a regional drainage mechanism for the municipal management districts and the property owners,” Gateway Planning President Scott Polikov said. “That’s the way to create a higher development potential with more value.”