



Upper Merion's new downtown rises near KofP Mall

Updated: April 4, 2016 — 1:08 AM EDT

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Although less than half a mile apart, the sprouting King of Prussia Town Center has no plans to compete with the mighty King of Prussia Mall, says the developer behind the new \$100 million project.

The Town Center - which sits where the Pennsylvania Turnpike, I-76, and Routes 422 and 202 converge - aims to be "the downtown of Upper Merion Township."

"We will be complementary," said Tom Sebastian, senior vice president of development for the JBG Companies, a large commercial real estate developer in the Mid-Atlantic region, headquartered in Chevy Chase, Md. "We are offering something that is a different experience for the consumer. When you're done shopping at the mall, you come here."

The upscale Town Center with vaulted ceilings and lots of glass in the storefronts will feature:

A town square with a grassy park in the middle for community events, such as live music concerts, free movie-viewing, yoga, and a farmers market.

Seven full-service restaurants.

Up to 3,000 apartments and 132 townhouses.

One million square feet of commercial space (office and hotel).

Decorative water features and a 60-foot-long "wall of fire" to illuminate the park at night.

The Town Center is among \$1 billion worth of development taking place in King of Prussia.

"From the expansion project happening at King of Prussia Mall, to the new iFly indoor skydiving facility set to open this spring, to the KOP Town Center, King of Prussia is becoming one of the hottest places to work, live, and have fun in the entire region," said Edward Harris, vice president of marketing for the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board.

The Town Center is JBG's first project in Pennsylvania. It has similar large-scale, mixed-use developments in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington.

"Our goal is to build a downtown for Upper Merion to connect with Wegmans on Main Street and the center's town square," he said. "The idea is to give the local residents something that they don't currently have - a pedestrian-friendly, outdoor shopping venue."

The center's first retailers, including L.A. Fitness and Fogo de Chao, will open in July. The planned town square in the middle of the development is slated to open at the same time, while the center's grand opening will be in September.

Sebastian said the 125-acre site was originally an 18-hole golf course until a decade ago. It was rezoned for commercial development in 2006.

JBG purchased 20 acres in April 2015 to build a 260,000-square-foot lifestyle shopping center to accommodate 17 buildings and about 40 retail and restaurant tenants.

IMC Construction Inc., based in Malvern, is the project's general contractor. The tenants, Sebastian said, will create hundreds of jobs, with most employees from the area.

Bill Jenaway, chairman of the Upper Merion Township Board of Supervisors, said, "We look forward to it being an enjoyable experience for residents and visitors alike while enhancing our strong economic and revenue base in the township."

Sebastian said the lure was the 140,000-square-foot Wegmans, which opened in 2014 and is adjacent to the property. It's now one of the highest-performing Wegmans in the area in terms of sales volume, he said.

Another draw was the 12 million square feet of office space within a three-mile radius. There are an estimated 60,000 workers in King of Prussia.

"King of Prussia has the largest concentration of office space outside of downtown Philly," Sebastian said.

It's those folks he wants meeting up at the Town Center after work for a meal or drink. "You don't go to a mall to do that," he said.

Public transit will be available to take consumers to both venues.

Surrounding the property will be up to 3,000 new apartments and a community of about 132 townhouses. They make up the larger Village at Valley Forge community, of which the Town Center is a part. Wegmans and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Specialty Care & Surgery Center are already open.

JBG has 80 percent of the retail space leased out. Among the signed tenants include a 7,700-square-foot Xfinity premiere store, honeygrow, L.A. Fitness, Nordstrom Rack, REI, Road Runner Sports, and Ulta Beauty.

The full-service restaurants that have signed leases include Paladar Latin Kitchen, City Works, Fogo de Chao, and Davio's. Another restaurant lease is expected to be signed this week, which Sebastian declined to name. A few more will be announced in the near future.

Sebastian said that when Nordstrom Rack and L.A. Fitness open at the Town Center, they will close their existing stores next to King of Prussia Mall.

L.A. Fitness is building its own two-story, state-of-the-art health club and plans to open midsummer, while Nordstrom Rack will open in late summer.

He said the remaining 20 percent of space would be mostly for fashion and soft goods retailers.

The site resembled a mini-city going up during a walking tour led by Sebastian last week. Crews were busy erecting "Main Street" with the new restaurants lining it.

All small roads leading to the center will be completed by June 1 and open to the public.