

Developer chosen for first apartments at Mueller

Simmons Vedder will build the first residential component in former airport's transformation.

By [M.B. Taboada](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

After years of planning, the transformation of the former Robert Mueller Municipal Airport is ready for takeoff. Major components are under construction, including the Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, offices and the first stores.

Simmons Vedder & Co. will start work early next year on Mueller's first residential component, an apartment complex on Aldrich Street at Airport Boulevard, at the entrance to the 711-acre site.

The Texas-based company will break ground on a four-story, 422,000-square-foot complex. The apartments, which will include two swimming pools, a fitness and business center and a covered parking garage, will be available for tenants during the first quarter of 2008.

Rents will range from \$925 a month for one-bedroom units to \$2,100 for three-bedroom units with 1,361 square feet. However, 10 percent of the units will be priced lower and reserved for people who make up to 60 percent of Austin's median income to match master developer Catellus Development Corp.'s commitment to providing affordable housing.

The first home builders will be named later this year. There's already a list of people who want to live at Mueller, where apartments, townhouses, condominiums and single-family houses must meet strict green building and community design standards.

For example, the apartments will have heat-reflecting metal roofs and energy-saving features, and half of the construction debris will be salvaged or recycled.

Simmons Vedder develops commercial and residential projects across the country. In Austin, its highest-profile project is the apartment complex at the Triangle, a 22-acre residential/retail project in Central Austin. It's also a developer of two large mixed-use projects in Williamson County.

"It's exciting to add the first residential component to the Mueller redevelopment," said John Burnham, development manager for Simmons Vedder. "It's a critical step in the redevelopment process."

The rental units will be designed as one building but will have the appearance of four distinct buildings because of varying architectural designs.

The residential development comes on the heels of the announcement of plans for the first three anchor retailers: Best Buy, Bed Bath & Beyond and Marshalls expect to open stores in April at the northwest quadrant, at East 51st Street and Interstate 35.

"These are two huge milestones," said Matt Whelan, who is the senior vice president of the project for Catellus. "We are very happy with the pace of the project, and it will likely just pick up from here."

The mixed-use development is the largest public-private venture in Austin's history and will transform the former airport into an urban village of homes, stores and offices. The Mueller project is expected to add \$1 billion to the city's tax base and house up to 10,000 residents and generate thousands of jobs.

The Mueller project has been 20 years in the making, starting with visionaries from the surrounding neighborhoods who began discussions on the potential for the land once the airport closed, which it did in 1999.

Jim Walker, a spokesman for Mueller-area neighborhood groups, said he's not as concerned about which builders sign on as long as they adhere to the master plan and vision of providing affordable housing and work for area residents.

"If any company is serious about committing to all those things, they can be a part of Mueller," he said.

Walker said when the city and Catellus signed the deal in December 2004, it marked only the halfway point for the neighborhoods. The recent announcements might equate to the completion of a contract, but it means something more to the neighborhood, he said.

"It's the beginning of the relationship with the master plan and the surrounding community," Walker said.

Much of the site is still largely open space, home to the occasional jack rabbit that darts across the parched fields. But there's plenty of activity at the western edge of the site.

What looks like a huge crater near the Aldrich Street entrance will become a 30-acre lake, the centerpiece of the first of several parks.

Major medical facilities are under way, including the Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, which is scheduled to open next year, and Strictly Pediatrics Ambulatory Surgical Center, a children's specialty medical facility.

Work also has started on Austin's second Ronald McDonald House, which will house families of patients at the hospital.

As the project develops, other tenants will move into the development. The University of Texas will begin in November the first phase of the Dell Pediatric Research Institute. The educational nonprofit Southwest Educational Development Laboratory will move its headquarters from downtown to Mueller during fall 2007.

mtaboada@statesman.com; 249-7053

ON THE WEB: If you're interested in housing at Mueller, sign up for updates at www.muelleraustin.com/register.html.

MORE ON THIS STORY



It might look like a crater, but this hole in the ground near the entrance to the 711-acre Mueller site will become a lake, the centerpiece of the first of several parks at the former airport.

The former executive air center at the Mueller airport, above, will become a visitors center and offices for master developer Catellus.



As the Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas rises at the former Robert Mueller Municipal Airport, residential development also is taking shape. Simmons Vedder & Co. has been selected to start work on apartments, and the first house builders will be named later this year



Simmons Vedder will start work next year on a 442-unit apartment complex, shown in this artist's rendering, on the Mueller site.

1. Retail: Work has started on major retail at Interstate 35 and East 51st Street.
2. Strictly Pediatrics Ambulatory Surgical Center: Work has started on a four-story building housing children's medical services.
3. Ronald McDonald House: Work has started on a 15-room facility for families of patients at the hospital that will open early next year.
4. University of Texas: Work starts in November on the first phase of the Dell Pediatric Research Institute.
5. Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas: The hospital is scheduled to open in early 2007.
6. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: The headquarters of the educational nonprofit will move next fall from downtown to Mueller.



7. Apartments: Simmons Vedder will start work next year on 442 apartments.
8. Visitors center: The former executive terminal is being converted into a visitors center and offices for Catellus Development Corp.
9. Lake park: Work has started on a lake that will be part of a 30-acre park.