



GEORGE WALKER IV / FILE / THE TENNESSEAN
Developers of a proposed shopping center on Hillsboro Pike say their plan could rival the chic Hill Center, which features a small downtown feel with tree-lined sidewalks and on-street parking.

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Upscale retail, office center aims to allay traffic snags

By CHAS SISK
Staff Writer

A local real estate firm is putting together a proposal for a dense shopping center along Hillsboro Pike, in the latest sign of Green Hills' rapid ascension as Middle Tennessee's most exclusive shopping district.

Officials at Brookside Properties said last week that they would unveil this summer a plan to revitalize the aging Hillsboro Plaza shopping center and two neighboring office buildings with a major redevelopment similar to the recently opened Hill Center at Green Hills.

The firm has not settled on a design, but Brookside executives say the development will aim to attract wealthy shoppers and high-profile companies — an approach that would compete with both neighboring upscale shopping centers and the region's suburban office parks.

The goal, Brookside officials said, is to create a pedestrian-friendly development where high-powered executives and the area's wealthy local residents can work, eat and shop without restarting their cars once they've arrived.

"We think Green Hills may offer part of that solution for Nashville," said David Crabtree, Brookside's executive vice president. "We don't want all the Fortune 500 companies to go to Cool Springs."

The project follows on the heels of the Hill Center, the dense "lifestyle center" shopping center that opened late last year. With its tight design of shops centered on a tree-lined central street, the \$70 million Hill Center has drawn a slew of retailers that cater to wealthier shoppers, including the furniture store West Elm, the women's clothing store Anthropologie and the organic grocer Whole Foods.

Brookside officials say they will create a retail center that is roughly the same size and at least as desirable. The plan would be to create a single office and retail center that connects Hillsboro Plaza, the 1960s-era shopping center that features Levy's clothing store and the Donut Den coffee shop, with the Green Hills Office Park and Century Plaza, a pair of office buildings in which the firm holds a stake.

Density encouraged

The office buildings would be renovated, while some portions of the shopping center would probably be razed and rebuilt. The development would also be designed to encourage visitors to enter from a side street, Richard Jones Road, which could relieve some of the congestion on Hillsboro Pike.

The developers also hope to encourage pedestrians to cross Hillsboro Road from The Mall at Green Hills, the posh shopping center that lies across the street.

"We have an opportunity, being across from the mall, to get that customer," Crabtree said.

Other details have not been determined, but Brookside officials said they hope to have a plan advanced enough to show to neighborhood groups and city officials by this summer.

Planning rules for the area around Brookside's property encourage the construction of mixed-use developments like the one the firm is planning, said Craig Owensby, a Metro spokesman.

"It's hard to say specifically without seeing a plan, but obviously, mixed-use and walkability are two of our major directives," he said.

Congestion could be a problem for the development. Traffic already backs up frequently around the Green Hills mall, and the added attraction of another dense shopping center could make that problem even worse, said Connie Cowan, a member of the board of directors of the Castleman-Hobbs Neighborhood Association.

"You have to drive to all of these things," Cowan said. "You can't walk anywhere in Green Hills."

Others said a pedestrian-friendly development could actually reduce traffic.

"Now we have a situation where you're getting in your car and going to a store, and then getting in the car again and going down the street 20 yards to another store," said Sean McGuire, the neighborhood's Metro councilman.

Brookside officials said their development is a reaction to the upscale renovations that are happening throughout the neighborhood. The success of Hill Center and The Mall at Green Hills at attracting upscale retailers has made aging shopping centers like the one it owns too valuable to leave as they are.

"We can't make markets," said Nelson Andrews, Brookside's chairman. "What we try to do is see where the trends are going and try to get in front of them."

Mary Jon Hicks, the chairwoman of the Green Hills Action Partners, agreed. Rising property values and increasingly chic stores make redevelopment inevitable.

"People are beginning to come more and more to Green Hills," Hicks said. "You can't really stop that, so you might as well manage that."