

LEANDER DEVELOPMENT

Plans for Texas X Park still underway

Entertainment center will bring hotels, shops and sports



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Here's how Matt Tolbert sees his investment in a mega sports facility planned in Leander: Kids in Austin will hop on a rail line and, within 20 minutes, be at a park where they can ride BMX bikes, wakeboard, see a concert and grab dinner.

When completed, the center is expected to have more than 23 traditional and extreme sporting activities, as well as shopping centers and the city's first hotels.

Investors say they are in the early stages of planning, but one of the center's major draws, the Texas X Park, could be open next summer. It will have inline skating, motocross and BMX courses alongside sports such as soccer, football and tennis.

Leander City Council members passed a development agreement and concept plan last summer that could have enabled construction on the park to start then. But Tolbert, an investor with Leander Capital Investors, which submitted the plan, said the group had to first get state building permits and clearance.

"We're hoping to have it open next summer. There's always been a summer of '08 schedule," he said.

Last week, the investors submitted a site plan to Leander city officials that detailed the roughly 170-acre Texas X Park.

The park, along with a retail center called Park Village, is estimated to cost \$66 million and will cover 205 acres off Bagdad Road and San Gabriel Parkway.

The entertainment center would be the only one of its kind in Central Texas, investors say.

Tolbert, a former professional race car driver, said there was a demand for an extreme sports hub in the area, especially as sports enthusiasts introduce their children to extreme sports.

"We're starting to see 25-year-old couples show up with their kids. These were just skaters and BMX riders; they didn't play baseball and football," he said. "We're going to hit the wave of the second generation, and it's going to be incredible."

Investors are paying for the park, and city leaders say taxpayers won't fund the project.

City officials say they don't have estimates on how much revenue the entertainment center could bring to the city, but the impact could be big.

"We anticipate there will be a lot of activity, and it's going to be good for the whole region," Leander Mayor John Cowman said.

An estimated 350,000 to 400,000 people are expected to visit the Texas X Park in its first year, said Bob Novit, a broker with Quick and Company Commercial Reality Inc.

Novit's group is working on the center's retail hub, Park Village, which will have restaurants, hotels and shops. Novit would not say what businesses have shown interest.

The retail center is expected to open after the Texas X Park and after Bagdad Road and San Gabriel Parkway are expanded, Novit said.

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