

APPEAL-DEMOCRAT

August 12, 2022

Costco officially coming to Linda

By Robert Summa



After countless rumors and several campaign promises, Costco officially confirmed Friday that it plans to build a new store at the site of the old Peach Tree Mall in Linda.

According to Yuba County Media and Community Relations Coordinator Russ Brown, officials from Costco and local property owners have now completed a monthslong private negotiation to bring the warehouse-style store to the area. The store is expected to be about 160,000 square feet in size.

Costco is a “multi-billion dollar global retailer with warehouse club operations in eight countries,” according to its site. “... Costco is a membership warehouse club, dedicated to bringing our members the best possible prices on quality brand-name merchandise. With hundreds of locations worldwide, Costco provides a wide selection of merchandise, plus the convenience of

specialty departments and exclusive member services, all designed to make your shopping experience a pleasurable one."

As of Friday, officials have not said when construction of the new Costco will begin or when it will open to the public.

"So far, no permits have been pulled – simply because it is so early in the process, following finalization of the agreement with landowners – but that will be happening very soon," Brown said in an email to the Appeal. "Yuba County staff looks forward to working with the Costco team."

Even though permits have not been pulled, Brown said that the company has applied for permits through the Yuba County Community Development and Services Agency, which is considered the first step to begin construction.

"This is a very exciting time for residents of Yuba County," Yuba County District 1 Supervisor Andy Vasquez said in a statement. "Costco took a hard look at the growth and strength of our community and knew it was the right place to build."

Earlier this year as Vasquez was running as an incumbent for his District 1 seat in the June 7 direct primary election, he had released a video touting the fact that Costco was coming to Linda.

"They said it couldn't be done. They said we were crazy. Well today, I'm beyond thrilled to announce that we did it. It's official, Costco is coming to Linda," Vasquez said in a Facebook video in May while standing in front of signatures that supported the effort to bring Costco to Linda.

When Vasquez spoke with the Appeal shortly after that video, he further explained some of what had been happening behind the scenes to bring Costco to Yuba County.

"What has gone on is that Costco came out here, there were a couple questions that they had. We took care of that. We addressed it," Vasquez previously said. "We gave them a letter that said this is what we're going to do along Lindhurst. This is what we're going to do to make sure their store is well-received. It's a win-win situation."

At the time, Vasquez said that according to David Lanza, a part owner of the Peach Tree Mall site, Costco was “closing escrow” on June 10. That date was later moved to another point in time, but much of the discussions that were occurring to bring in Costco were still happening privately.

The Appeal had reached out to county officials over the following weeks, but the county was reluctant to speak on the matter publicly because details were still being discussed.

Brent Hastey, a current Yuba Water Agency director who lost a reelection bid for his seat after the June 7 primary, also was adamant at the time that Costco was coming to Linda. Shortly after Vasquez had made his initial announcement on Facebook, Hastey did the same.

At the time, he posted this message from the owners of the Peach Tree Mall site: “Costco wouldn’t be coming to Yuba County without Brent. Many vital infrastructure and economic revitalization projects would not be underway if it weren’t for Brent’s leadership.”

When asked to clarify the following day about what exactly was happening, Hastey was confident the deal was done.

“I have talked to the three owners, hence the quote on my page. My understanding is Costco is all in. That means they have signed the agreements. The last thing they needed was a signature from the CEO and that has been done,” Hastey previously said in an email to the Appeal. “The owners believe that the agreement needed with SaveMart will be here by tomorrow. That is the last thing needed. My understanding is Costco likes to announce when they pull permits and they plan on pulling on June 10th. So confirmation should come shortly. I do know the owners well enough that if they were not confident, they would not have agreed to the quote.”

Over the past year, the region and especially Yuba County, has seen increased interest from new businesses. Brown said that planners for the county believe that Costco’s arrival will be a “catalyst for inspiring other national brands to consider building” in the southern portion of the county.

“The one thing that is catching the attention of prospective businesses is our team of Yuba County employees who really do go out of their way to make sure each step in the process is easier and pleasant,” Vasquez said in a statement on Friday. “Staff took to heart the direction of the board of supervisors to ensure a supportive business climate, and I am extremely thankful for that determination.”

Increased interest in getting something new at the former Peach Tree Mall began after a fire occurred there on Oct. 2, 2021. The massive blaze burned a large portion of the structure. The fire was started by a homeless man, Thomas P. Wright, who was arrested on Oct. 2 after being pulled out of the vacant building that was burning at around 5:30 a.m. that day.

Wright intentionally set fire to a squatter encampment he shared with his girlfriend inside the old mall building, the Appeal previously reported. The couple had been having an argument and Wright threatened to burn them both alive, according to the Yuba County District Attorney's Office.

Law enforcement said Wright had lit insulation and other materials on fire inside the building. Linda Fire Protection District Chief Kyle Heggstrom said at the time that the third of the building that caught fire collapsed and the roof structure burned completely.

Wright pleaded no contest to arson and making criminal threats on Oct. 27, 2021.

Yuba County Superior Court Judge Julia Scrogin sentenced Wright to five years, eight months in state prison on Nov. 29, 2021, for the arson of the former mall and making a criminal threat to his girlfriend.

In early December, the district attorney's office said the owners of the property were working to remove the hazardous waste and demolish approximately 178,000 square feet that was damaged by the fire -- about half of the mall's original 400,000 square feet of retail space.

Previously, the mall had been mostly vacant for more than 36 years after flooding caused by a levee collapse along the Yuba River in 1986, Brown said.

As the county has attempted to revitalize the Linda area and the county in general, the Yes to Yuba program was started to bring in more businesses and help those already in the county.

"In 2020, Yuba County established 'Yes to Yuba,' an initiative to help new and existing businesses navigate the required processes to set up shop," Brown said in a statement. "The program includes managers and directors from the county departments most likely to be called in to meet particular needs during permitting and construction, as well as a full-time project manager."

For more information about Yes to Yuba, visit YesToYuba.com.