

Walmart Supercenter project in Lodi moves forward

By James Striplin

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After years of delay, work will begin soon on a Walmart Supercenter in Lodi.

Walmart is taking the first steps toward construction with hopes of opening the doors in early 2016, said spokeswoman Delia Garcia of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

The proposed 18-acre pad site is for the 216,000-square-foot Walmart Supercenter, and is awaiting the submission of a grading permit.

The Supercenter would be part of the planned 36-acre Lodi Shopping Center, located at the corner of Kettleman Lane and Lower Sacramento Road.

The new shopping center will feature 11 other businesses, which, according to City Planner Craig Hoffman, will have pad sites laid out around late August.

So far, the businesses interested in those spots have been fast food restaurants, he said.

Wal-Mart Stores has applied for and satisfied the requirements of a grading permit, Hoffman said, and the company expects excavators to start as early as Monday morning.

Garcia expects construction of the building to begin in the next couple of weeks, she said.

"It's all about location, location, location," Garcia said. "We've outgrown the existing location."

It will take approximately 300 associates to run the new Supercenter, Garcia said. Most will transfer from the current Walmart, located across Lower Sacramento Road from the new Supercenter.

The City of Lodi included a stipulation in the approval of the Walmart Supercenter that the new store could not be opened until the corporation either leases or sells the old Walmart site, or purchases a bond to destroy the building.

Wal-Mart Stores did submit an application to destroy the older building, but only to fulfill that part of the agreement, Hoffman said. The company plans to lease the building out to another business, he said.

The Lodi Walmart Supercenter has been stalled for 10 years, eight of which stemmed from a court ruling by San Joaquin County Judge Elizabeth Humphreys, who said Wal-Mart's environmental reports needed more research.

The lawsuit was filed by activist group Lodi First and Citizens for Open Government, and approval status for the Walmart Supercenter was restarted.

Humphreys later ruled that Wal-Mart's documentation was adequate in a second hearing, which carried over to the Third District Court of Appeals, which ruled that documents were valid.

In 2012 the California Supreme Court refused to hear the case, and the project was pushed forward.

From there, the project ran into a few snags, but Garcia said the company is moving forward and is glad to serve Lodi.

"As we've prepared to build the store, it has taken some time to fully satisfy a few outstanding issues, including identifying the most viable location for a storm water retention basin and securing mitigation property to satisfy Mitigation Measure I.A. and the San Joaquin Council of Government's Habitat Conservation Fee requirements," Garcia said. "We've been working diligently toward resolving these outstanding issues and are excited to begin construction in a few weeks."