



GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

These 10 big Johnson County projects hope to revamp burbs with retail, housing, fun

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The watchword for Johnson County in 2017 was development and growth, and it shows no sign of slowing in 2018.

From downtown Overland Park to a development replacing Olathe's demolished Great Mall of the Great Plains, major residential, business and community projects are on the drawing boards. Many of those are at least slated to begin construction in 2018. Some, like the Mission Gateway project, have had years of setbacks. Others, like Brookridge in Overland Park, still face some public opposition and regulatory obstacles.

Projects like the buildout beyond the Lenexa City Center are the culmination of decades of planning for a changing suburbia.

“We’ve been at it for 20 years,” Lenexa Community Development Director Beccy Yocham said, noting that planning for the Lenexa City Center began with a community visioning exercise in 1997. The \$75 million complex now includes City Hall, a new recreation center and public market. While the civic and government center itself opened last summer, it’s the catalyst for more private development underway near the intersection of 87th Street Trafficway and Renner Road.

The development boom follows years of economic recovery since the Great Recession.

“Yes, we are busy,” said Jack Messer, Overland Park Planning and Development Services Director. The city has seen \$4 billion of new development in the last decade, he said, with much of that occurring in the last seven years.

“Three or four years ago, things really kicked into gear,” he said.

Ten key projects to watch are:

1. Mission Gateway. This is a make-or-break year for the long-troubled project at the prominent corner of Shawnee Mission Parkway and Johnson Drive. New York developer Tom Valenti bought the 16-acre site in 2005 but hasn't been able to bring anything to fruition. Last October, the Mission City Council approved a development plan for a \$200 million mixed-use project on the former Mission Mall site. The development agreement was a milestone and sets an Oct 31, 2018 deadline to start work on the first of three phases, with 170 market-rate apartment units and some retail. Its first full year of operation would be 2021. Future phases envision two hotels, an office building and more retail and entertainment spaces.

2. Mission Trails. EPC Real Estate Group expects to begin construction this summer on the \$40 million Mission Trails project, approximately 200 apartments on top of retail on the south side of Johnson Drive just east of Lamar. Completion is expected about 18 months later.

3. Downtown Overland Park has a ton of activity. Construction continues on The Vue, a \$44 million, 219-unit Hunt Midwest project at 80th and Marty streets, slated to open late 2018 or early 2019. The Market Lofts, developed by Paul Goehausen, has suffered delays but the \$10 million, 36-unit project across from The Vue is slated to open in July.

At 81st and Metcalf, EPC has broken ground on its 150-unit senior-living Avenue 81 project, adjacent to the 220-unit Avenue 80 building that opened last fall. The City Council could take up debate again May 7 on the controversial \$48.5 million Edison OP office/entertainment complex proposed just south of the farmer's market.

4. BluHawk. This 300-acre Price Brothers mixed-use development in the vicinity of 159th Street and U.S. Highway 69 has been years in the planning, with some construction already underway. In November, the Overland Park City Council approved 200 apartments in eight buildings to be built near 167th Street and Lowell Avenue in the development's southwest corner. But announcements are expected later this year on the tourism-oriented elements of the project — the Cosmosphere Innovation Space and a multisport athletic complex.

5. Brookridge. This massive \$1.8 billion proposal surfaced in 2014 to redevelop the Brookridge golf course east of Antioch Road between 103rd Street and Interstate 435. It has been somewhat reduced in scope because of neighborhood concerns but still calls for more than 2,000 apartments, two hotels, a performance hall, 1.8 million square feet of office space, plus retail and restaurants in three construction phases. Developer Grant Curtin says the first phase “Village” construction should begin this year, including office and retail in the site’s northwest quadrant. A City Planning Commission rezoning hearing is scheduled for March 12 and projected tax incentives still need regulatory approvals.

6. Great Mall of the Great Plains. Details are sketchy, but developers have a \$305 million plan to redevelop the 270-acre site of Olathe’s demolished Great Mall at Interstate 35 and 151st Street. The plan, heavy on sports and fitness, was unveiled in early January but is very preliminary. An application for Kansas STAR bonds was submitted in December by VanTrust Real Estate LLC, with partners including Woodbury Corp. of Salt Lake City and Loretto Properties. Plans call for hotels, apartments, restaurants, retail and multipurpose sporting facilities.

7. Lenexa City Center. Private development is planned on 200 acres spanning all four quadrants of 87th and Renner, around the city center in the southwest quadrant. Construction is underway at the District at City Center, a mixed-use project with 175 residential units, plus retail and office. The \$28 million Shawnee Mission aquatic center is also under construction just across from the recreation center and should open in 2019. The Fairways Villas, 75 units, and the Central Green mixed-use four-story office and retail complex are under construction.

8. Sonoma Plaza. Also in Lenexa, Oddo Development is building the \$250 million Sonoma Plaza apartment and commercial project on 85 acres at the southeast corner of Interstate 435 and 87th Street. The Lenexa City Center was a catalyst for this project, which ultimately is expected to have about 975 units in three apartment complexes, with the first phase expected this July. The project also includes as much as 175,000-square-feet of retail and commercial space, including a grocery anchor.

9. Westbrooke Green. In Shawnee, the \$113 million redevelopment of the dilapidated Westbrooke Village shopping center at 75th Street and Quivira Road is expected to start by this fall and take several years, in several phases. The 32-acre project involves five five-story apartment buildings with about 530-units, plus an outdoor plaza, parking garage and 108,500-square-feet of restaurants and stores. It’s a joint venture of Mission Peak Capital and New York-based Extell Development Company.

10. Merriam Community Center. Merriam's big focus this year will be a new \$30 million center at Vavra Park, 6040 Slater St., with indoor and outdoor pools and a full-sized gym. City voters last September approved a 10-year, quarter-cent sales tax that took effect Jan. 1 to pay for it. The city is in negotiations on a design-build contract with McCarthy Building Companies and hopes to break ground late this year. The project is slated for completion in 2020. A decision is also expected soon on whether to add a new library to the campus.

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