

Community Response to the April 2014 Concept Plan released by Forest City for the Eastbridge Town Center

Document Overview

An expedited process combining available resources and feedback from the community was conducted in the days after Forest City's April 2014 release of the Eastbridge Town Center concept plan. An overview of the emerging themes are presented in this synthesized response. To summarize: The community is pleased that progress is being made, a strong preference is present for natural options at the grocery store, modifications to the concept plan are desired to increase walkability and align with other new urbanism qualities, the gas station should not be located in the town center in order to avoid human and environmental health concerns, and wildlife in the nearby nature reserve would benefit from a visual barrier blocking light pollution at night. Motivation for and details of these themes are expanded on in the remainder of this document.

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In addition to research and historical community survey data, these recommendations are based on substantial and iterations of feedback captured directly from residents via the Eastbridge Town Center at Bluff Lake Retail Development group on Facebook (530+ members). In addition, an option to comment anonymously and/or without a Facebook account was available through the Stapleton United Neighbors (SUN) web site. Refer to APPENDIX A for feedback directly from residents (edited to remove names).

For reference, the Concept Plan about which feedback is provided in this document is provided in Appendix B.

1. Preferred Product Selection at King Soopers/Kroger

The residents of Stapleton appreciate the historic gamble that King Soopers/Kroger made opening the store on Quebec in 2003. As such, we embrace the opportunity to further the partnership between Kroger and Stapleton with a 2nd store anchoring the Eastbridge Town Center. While swipe card data is available for those who shop at the Quebec or other King Soopers stores, we hope that survey data (containing responses from residents who do not currently shop at Kroger affiliates) will be considered when determining how to stock the store. Survey results highlight that this community would appreciate a strong focus on natural and organic products sourced from sustainable, ethical, and local producers. While we have been informed that the Fresh Fare model is no longer being pursued by Kroger, we would want the next closest thing.

1.1 2013 SUN Survey Summary:

All adult residents were invited to participate (ballpark: 6000 housing units). The survey was open from October 7-16, 2013 (10 days). Questions included education, transportation, and development preferences. 1585 residents answered questions, 1400 completed the survey. Below are questions and responses about the Eastbridge Town Center:

1) Given that King Soopers has the 1st right of refusal for any grocer anywhere in Stapleton until 2025, King Soopers could be the grocer that will end up going in the Eastbridge Town Center. If this is the case, what kind of King Soopers would you like to see there?

- Fresh Fare (a smaller-natural store managed by Kroger): 59%
- No preference, just build the town center and I will shop there: 17%
- Large King Soopers: 13%
- I do not/will not shop at King Soopers: 6%
- Other: 4%
- No opinion: 4%
- Don't know: 1%

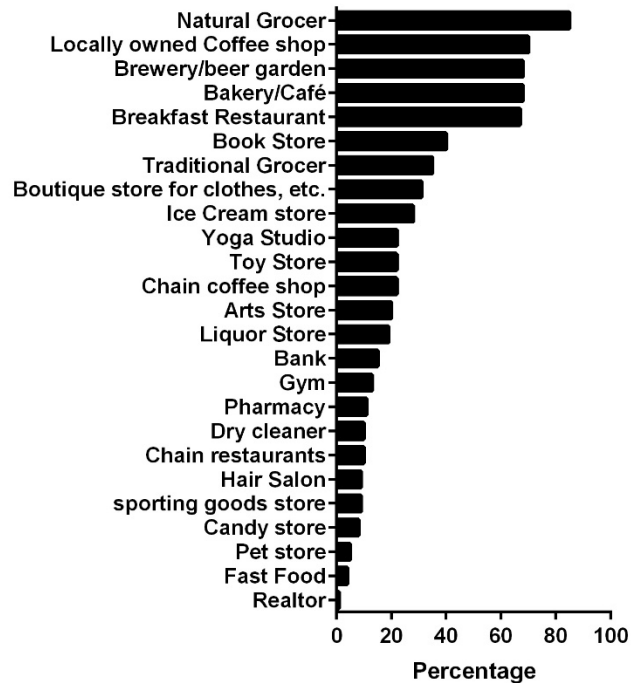
2) Do you want a gas station to be present in the Eastbridge Town Center?

- Yes: 42%
- No: 34%
- No preference: 22%
- Don't know: 2%

3) How interested would you be in having each other following types of amenities in the Eastbridge Town Center? (% indicating "very interested")

- Top response: **Natural Grocer (85%)**
- 7th response: **Traditional Grocer (35%)**
- all options listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Twenty options for Town Center Amenities and the percentage of respondents indicating "very interested"



Results from Stapleton United Neighbors fall 2013 community survey, n=1585 respondents

2. Concept Plan Design Comments

Stapleton is the country's premier New Urbanism community and it is the application of New Urbanism principles that have fueled its growth and created resident expectations. Much of the negative reaction to the Eastbridge Town Center concept plan has been over the very large parking lot, strip-mall/plaza-like layout. Community-friendly modifications to the concept plan have been

illustrated (Figure 2) by a community member and have been well received by the residents. Major specific changes desired by the community include:

- Distributing parking across the Town Center.
- Increase the plaza/retail space. Consider a 2nd story on the shops in order to better exploit the view of the mountains and city skyline.

Figure 2. Modified Concept Plan



2.1 Geneva Court

Keeping Geneva Court intact as a thru-street for cars with a very low 5mph speed limit is a priority.

- Geneva court remaining a place that could help vehicular traffic flow in a way that is still safe for pedestrians, and still be a space that could be closed and merged with the plaza for events.

A 52' wide Geneva Court could include bike lanes on each side and parallel parking. For example, an aerial view of a Main Street from Hendersonville, North Carolina (Figure 3a), depicts wide sidewalks with space for restaurants to have tables outside for dining. Staggered diagonal and parallel parking along with raised crosswalks serve to slow traffic. This street is closed for festivals.

In Denver, South Pearl St. (Figure 3b) is an example of a well-designed neighborhood commercial block using the North Carolina principles above (minus the bike lanes).

Figure 3a. Historic Downtown Main Street, Hendersonville NC



Figure 3b. Pearl Street, Denver



3. Gas Station related Health Concerns

For this project and all work moving forward in Stapleton, we ask for a 100 meter buffer around all residential housing, schools, and wildlife refuges when siting a gas station. Although current zoning in the city of Denver allows for closer proximity, the intentional design of Stapleton allows for better planning decisions. Below is the reasoning for this position, but to summarize: as this is a master planned community, the best planning should go into decisions, especially those that affect human health.

Applying the 100m buffer standard (Figure 4) leaves only the tip of one parcel as appropriate for a gas station and this parcel is currently proposed for locating a grocery store or parking spaces.

While there is not 100% agreement in the community about eliminating the gas station from the Eastbridge Town Center, given the existing nearby location of homes, schools, and parks, and the New Urbanism principles that make Stapleton a walkable, desirable and *healthy place* to live, locating a gas station on any parcel of the Town Center is contrary to the spirit of Stapleton. Eliminating a gas station from the Eastbridge Town Center preserves many qualities that residents are looking for in the town center, protects residents surrounding the town center from excess VOCs, and avoids the Quebec King Soopers gas station disaster where the gas station and parking lot for the grocery store create traffic congestion and idling cars. We recommend the elimination of the gas station from the Eastbridge Town Center plan, recommending the use of either one of the two options for gasoline under 1 mile from the site of the Eastbridge Town Center: 7-11 at Havana St and 40th Ave (0.92 miles from EBTC), 7-11 at E Montview Blvd and Galena St (0.99 miles), in addition to the nearby Quebec King Soopers.

3.1 Background/general information

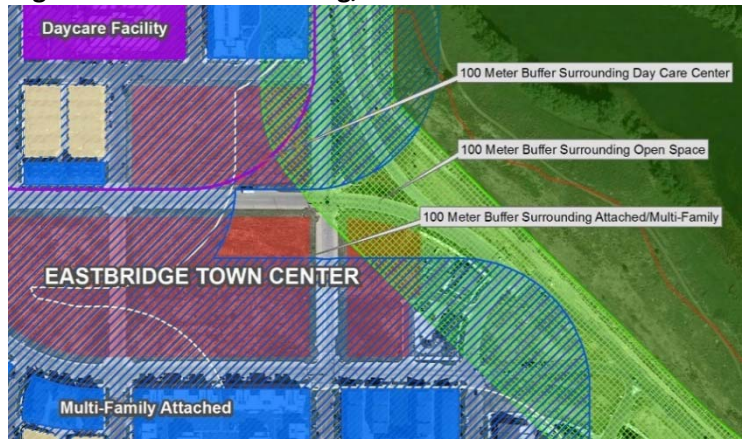
Scientists have studied the effects on human health associated with extended exposure to a gas station, key findings:

- Gasoline contains Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). When gas is spilled on the ground during vehicle refueling, or when the fuel replaces empty space in the tank, VOCs are released into the surrounding air. Gas stations are an *area source* emitter of VOCs. *Area sources* are defined as small pollution sources that emit less than 10 tons per year of a criteria or hazardous air pollutant or less than 25 tons per year of a combination of pollutants.¹ Area sources collectively contribute over 50% of particulate matter emissions and are the major contributor of VOC emissions.²
- Breathing low levels of VOCs for long periods of time may increase some people's risk of health problems. Exposure to VOCs may make symptoms worse in people who have asthma or are particularly sensitive to chemicals. Common symptoms of short-term exposure to high levels of VOCs include eye, nose and throat irritation; headaches; nausea / vomiting; dizziness; and worsening of asthma symptoms. Persons with long-term high-level exposure have increased risk of: cancer, liver damage, kidney damage and central nervous system damage.³
- Benzene is the major VOC emitted from refueling. Benzene is classified by EPA⁴ as a Group A carcinogen and by the International Agency for Research on Cancer at the World Health Organization as a Group 1 carcinogen.⁵ Both EPA and IARC's classifications place Benzene in the top carcinogenic classes - as a known carcinogen to humans based on extensive research.

3.2 Specific research findings

- Benzene concentrations have been measured in cord blood of pregnant women, and the fetal cord blood levels of Benzene were found to be equal or greater to those levels found in the maternal blood. Benzene concentrations have also been measured in breast milk.
- The contribution of petrol stations to the formation of the total benzene concentrations observed is significant in all the examined environments (urban, suburban, rural). There is a clear influence on the measured benzene concentrations, depending on the activity of the petrol station, the leaks of the fuel tanks, and the meteorological conditions. As a consequence, the population living in vicinity of the examined urban location is exposed to additive concentrations...increasing the leukemia risk caused by benzene alone from 3% to 21%.⁶
- Air around a gas station in Spain in 2008⁷ assessed levels of VOCs in the air relative to the increased levels that exist in an urban environment. VOC levels were above background up to 75m from the site of the gas station.

Figure 4. 100 meter housing, wildlife and school buffer



4. Wildlife Protection: Proximity of the town center to the Bluff Lake Nature Center (BLNC) Wildlife Refuge

Because of the close proximity of the future town center to the Bluff Lake Nature Center (BLNC) Wildlife Refuge, the residents of Stapleton, in collaboration with the BLNC management team, have identified several design elements that would protect wildlife:

- 1) Should a gas station be included, ensuring that runoff from the station (gas and oil) would not drain towards BLNC. If a gas station is part of the Town Center design, the location would preferably be as far from BLNC as possible, west of Havana.
- 2) Minimizing light pollution from the Town Center to BLNC. Light pollution is known to drive wildlife to live elsewhere. The lighting from the Town Center if not mitigated properly can add significantly to the already intrusive prison lighting. Light pollution concerns could be assuaged by building a berm near the corner of Havana and MLK to shield the wildlife refuge. Years ago, when the extension to MLK was being discussed, the former director at BLNC and some BLNC board members rallied around a medium-sized berm along MLK for the entire length of BLNC. The berm recommended here is different—more of a “spot” berm and possibly larger. The berm would be most effective northeast of Havana Way right at the bend. Many of BLNC’s most precious animals are the birds in the tops of trees, this should be kept in mind when determining berm height and placement. More about light pollution and wildlife and birds in particular can be found at: http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/04/0417_030417_tvlightpollution.html
- 3) Minimize signage. The visibility of significant signage (e.g. the big exterior “King Soopers” sign) from “down below” the bluff at BLNC should be minimized. While viewing such aspects of the urban landscape from the BLNC parking lot is unavoidable, seeing it from down at the lake would detract from the quality of the experience of visiting the wildlife preserve.
- 4) As the Town Center is next to Stapleton’s largest green space, businesses that take on some green elements and conduct themselves that way would be championed by BLNC thus helping to market the businesses to refuge visitors.

References

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APPENDIX A: Direct Language from SUN website write-ins and Eastbridge Town Center Facebook Page

A.1 Social Media: general feedback on concept plan (+# used to indicate others endorsed the comment)

- (+5) My biggest concern is the gas station. I do not feel it's an appropriate use of land in the Eastbridge area nor do I feel it's necessary as there is a 7-11 just down Havana (less than 1 mile away). The residential areas near the land where the gas station is being proposed are, in my opinion, way too close. I feel the gas station poses a potential environmental threat (I would still like a study down on the effects it would have on Bluff Lake) and will most likely bring down property values in Eastbridge.
- (+5) My biggest concern with the gas station is the congestion. The current KS is very busy and there is actually a considerable amount of fighting, arguing, and verbal fights that occur around that gas station. We stopped going there because it stopped feeling safe.
- (+3) just looks like every other plaza strip mall parking lot type of blahhh-ness
- (+3) I am very worried about the gas station as well. I have seen crashes as people fight over pumps on numerous occasions. I have seen fights break out. I fill my car up elsewhere at a higher cost because of the craziness there.
- (+4) My concerns are the large size of the KS, loading from Havana, which will cause trucks to have to continue south into the neighborhood to turn around. The lack of a true Town Center with multiple stores and a community gathering area. The vast dominating parking lot. The gas stations affect on property values and it's location in relation to Residences, ie noise and light pollution. This project does not conform to the ideas laid out in the Green Book. FC is washing their hands on this by turning it over to a third party, where is the oversight from the SDC, CAB, the City or even FC itself? Lastly, will FC, KS and the Third party commit to working toward addressing and resolving these concerns with the community, so that the Center will be successful?
- (+6) I really hope this "concept" is changed drastically as it does not take into account the new urbanism that so many Stapleton residents moved here for. A monstrosity of a parking lot and a gas station does not promote a pedestrian style community that I know is so important to our the residents. My expectation when I bought in Stapleton was that this second town center would be a similar plan as 29th st. Town center.



- (+4) This is what we were sold on (see photo)
- I think [the photo above] is a good concept with storefronts on the street and parking to the rear. 2nd Avenue in Lowry also offers a good model where the Albertson's main entrance is 90 degrees to 2nd Avenue with a secondary entrance on 2nd ave through their coffee shop. Storefront retail exists on the rest of 2nd ave with angled street parking in front and the bigger parking lot behind. Keeping Geneva Ct also offers a good future connection to mixed use parcel north of MLK that is currently undeveloped as shown in David's post.
- [note: this commenter was pointed to additional resources about the agreement between Forest City and King Soopers.] (+2) You can't tell me that Lakewood is a good place for a Whole Foods but Stapleton is not. I am a health conscious mom, just like every other mom I know here, and I want a natural food store. WE want a natural food store! A smaller, organic grocer with a smaller parking lot and more space for other smaller retailers and community gathering. That's what the community wants.
- (+6) As best I can tell from the Denver Zoning Code the parking requirement is 1.875 spaces per 1000 sq ft of retail. The current concept is significantly over. You just can't give away gobs of free parking and still have walkable. The previous concepts are indeed better in that respect to parking and a traditional commercial street on Geneva Court. WE SHOULD FIGHT TO KEEP GENEVA CT as our main street, not a parking lot.

- (+6) King Soopers has a contractual right of first refusal. The natural grocers have declined interest. I strongly want a natural grocer, too, but I don't think there is much we can do on that point. The gas station and walkability of the town center are points that we can stress.
- (+3) If fights are breaking out at the KS gas station, wouldn't a second one with the same prices help alleviate that? That is the cheapest place for many miles to get gas, currently. Of course we need to get the data on how the gas station will be built safely (the rules and codes are strict on this, no?), but there are houses right across 28th and right across Quebec from that gas station, and did anyone put up signs for those residents? The old drawings never said there wouldn't be a gas station, and the car wash is already utilitarian at best. Do you want to sit at a cafe watching the car wash? As long as it's built safely, it's a good place for another cheap gas station, and the cheapest ones are always attached to a KS. At least this one is separated so that the traffic for gas won't impede the grocery shoppers.
- (+4) Parking for a 58,000 s.f. Retail Food Store is $1.875/1,000 \text{ s.f.} = 109 \text{ spaces}$. Parking for 22,000 feet of other shops retail/restaurants is more complicated. Say half the space is retail: $11,000 \text{ s.f.} @ 1.875 \text{ spaces}/1,000 \text{ s.f.} = 21 \text{ spaces}$. And the other half at Restaurant uses - $11,000 \text{ s.f.} @ 3.75/1,000 = 42 \text{ spaces}$. All told for the FC numbers from Tasha, the total number of spaces would need to be 172 parking spaces.
The FC proposal shows 358 parking spaces on the site, which is more than TWICE the required number per Section 9.7.9.5 District Specific Standards of the Denver Zoning Code.
Looks like there is PLENTY of room for an alternate/acceptable design for a Town Center that complies with the concept of Stapleton and meets the minimum requirements of the City of Denver.
- (+7) Less concrete, more green. Less parking, more walkable areas. More storefronts overall. Hopefully this will include a nice/small natural grocer on the plaza or Geneva Court.
- A couple people asked about structured parking: This is from an article from the EPA about parking. Pricing should be comparable.
Considering per space construction costs in Portland of \$5,000 to \$7,000 for surface parking, upwards of \$15,000 for surface structures, and \$25,000 to \$30,000 for below-grade structures.
The surface parking costs should be lower here in Stapleton.
- Looking at the overall site, each parking space should require about 300 s.f. - the space, drive aisles, circulation, basic landscaping areas. Basic calculations will be able to provide a better estimate of the development opportunities: More retail/restaurant space and less parking makes better economics for the Developer
- Okay, who wants to look at the optimization? West lot is approx 109,726 s.f., center lot is approx: 28,146 s.f., and the east lot is 154,979 s.f. These numbers are likely within 2% given the source of the shape file I am utilizing. Leave probably 15% of the lot for landscaping. There are aggressive ways to make the paved parking areas smaller - but, not using compact car spaces because that only results in damaged doors on cars.
- Don't forget that compelling people to utilize on street parking in lieu of a parking lot serves to make pedestrians to feel more protected from traffic and will serve to slow down traffic on MLK and surrounding streets.

A.2 Social media: crowd sourcing a preferred alternative plan (resident initiated)

Here is a revised plan showing a larger TC, Geneva Ct as a throughway, and plenty of distributed parking. Showing a possible solution to the loading dock issues and concerns. Trucks would pull in from WB MLK, then back into the angled dock, and exist onto EB MLK. In this arrangement, the parking is still in excess of the required. This plan shows 101 spaces in the Town Center parcel, and 187 parking spaces in the grocery store parcel.



- This is my favorite!! I was picturing something like this, but I couldn't envision it well enough to articulate it. You really nailed the parking arrangement. so good!
- This really addresses most issues, I could definitely get behind something very similar to this!
- much, much better!
- As it is depicted in this plan, I think it is important to keep the loading area for the grocery store on MLK so the delivery trucks don't have to come deeper into the neighborhood. If they can enter and exit at MLK, they can get out of Stapleton easier. But if they have to come south of MLK, it becomes more likely that they'll have to drive deeper into the neighborhood to get out
- I like this modification the best and assume that the interior portion of Geneva Ct. could still be closed off for events, leaving access at 29th Drive and at MLK.
- I do like the updates to the concept plan! I do have a couple of other points: I was expecting the concept plan to look a bit more like 29th. I don't see a lot of retail space or a concept that really encourages walkability. The fountain area in 29th is a really amazing for families and helps create a sense of small town community. Where does that fit into the plan. The Grocery store parking, while improved, is still large. Do we really need that much parking?? It sounds like it is still in excess and using that space for more pedestrian friendly activities would be nice. Lastly, I have seen a lot of comments on the gas station and the lack of need for it. I am assuming the KS has some skin in wanting a gas station and requiring it. However, I am not sold on the need for a gas station and would like to see that commented on. Thanks!

- Looks Good! My only suggestion would be that Geneva Ct ought to be laid out as a regular street, preferably with parallel parking on both sides. A 52' width is ideal if you include bike lanes on each side. Here is the South Pearl St. example of a fine neighborhood commercial block using those principles (no bike lanes):



- Geneva Ct should actually function as a street, not a parking lot or part of a parcel. If done right, that one block of Geneva Ct can be our main street and be as attractive a S. Pearl Street in Platt Park, Gaylord Street in Wash Park, or Kearney St. in Park Hill.

A.3 Social Media: question for Forest City, Is the concept plan designed to intentionally limit the available retail space?

- Just for illustrating purposing, I pasted the existing Quebec store and parking lot less the gas station onto the Eastbridge site. I also pasted the two largest buildings from 29th ave with the street in between them still and one parking lot on the site, There is plenty of space left over to add additional buildings, reconfigure layout, add a plaza or add parking as needed. I am wondering if FC is trying to purposely limit the size of the Town Center/Plaza pads as they might be concerned about the ability to fill them. That being said, even if the amount of square footage available to stores in the TownCenter/Plaza is kept at the current proposal, there is more than enough room for a larger plaza or a park. There is even room for a street. Its obvious the currently proposed parking lot for KS is too large.



- I take from the words and tone of the statements from Forest City that they are not confident of the ability to fill retail space in Eastbridge and made clear that nothing would be built on spec. Given the cost of new construction will necessarily drive higher rents than elsewhere, it may be difficult for many retailers to make sense of locating in Eastbridge. It occurred to me the other day that perhaps the reason for placing the buildings on either end, and the huge parking lot in the middle, is to allow for the construction of an additional pad or two along the east side of Geneva Ct., should the demand for retail space justify doing so in the future.
- definitely a good point and something hopefully we can get an answer on at the meetings

A.4 SUN Web Site Comments/Questions

- Why is a gas station required at the Eastbridge Town Center? That is the LAST thing that needs to be placed in the middle of a residential space? Everyone within a block will be able to smell gas fumes 24 hours/day. GET RID OF IT! There is a 7-11 right down the street on Havana, 2 stations on Quebec and one on Montview & Central Park Blvd. WE DO NOT NEED IT.
- My concerns are the large size of the KS, loading from Havana, which will cause trucks to have to continue south into the neighborhood to turn around. The lack of a true Town Center with multiple stores and a community gathering area. The vast dominating parking lot that appears to be larger than needed per Denver Zoning guides. The gas stations effect on property values and it's location in relation to Residences, ie noise and light pollution. This project does not conform to the ideas laid out in the Green Book. FC is washing their hands on this by turning it over to a third party, where is the oversight from the SDC, CAB, the City or even FC itself? Lastly, will FC, KS and the Third party commit to working toward addressing and resolving these concerns with the community, so that the Center will be successful? I think the majority of the community wants to work with all parties to see a resolution and a successful Town Center.
- The city of Denver has a number of micro-commercial districts about a block in size organized around streets in neighborhoods such as the Highlands, Washington Park, Platt Park, Park Hill, Lowry and East 29th Avenue in Stapleton that are attractive and vibrant. Why is Forest City pursuing a plaza type concept for the Eastbridge Town center and why is it felt this approach will be superior to a traditional street-based commercial district?
- I have very serious concerns about the Eastbridge Towncenter Concept Plan.
 - 1) The amount of parking is in excess. This does NOT promote walkability or maintain a pedestrian friendly area for residents.
 - 2) We don't need another gas station!!!! How can we use this space for more retail/small shops?
 - 3) Where are the additional shops like that of the 29th Town Center.Please let me know how I can help advocate for our community!
- I'm glad that King Soopers is building at Eastbridge. I like the products they offer and their customer service. I'm also happy that they want to build a gas station. We need more gas stations near Stapleton. The only two current options are the King's on Quebec or the 7-11 near DSST. I hope the Town Center is developed so that there is a meeting/gathering place for the community and the Town Center is pedestrian-friendly.
- Has Forest City ever explained WHY a grocery store must anchor the new town center? also, what were the specific reasons why the other grocers did not think that location would be viable?

APPENDIX B: Concept Plan Proposed by Forest City for the Eastbridge Town Center, April 2014



In response to numerous requests, attached is a "concept plan" for the Eastbridge retail development. It is called a concept plan because it is just that, a concept for the development providing a direction for final site planning and design. In this case the concept is to locate the grocer to the east end of the site and a town center organized around a plaza to the west. A gas station would be located east of Havana adjacent to the existing car wash. This plan suggests a town center of 22,000sf with shops and services located in two buildings.

The grocer will execute the development of their store and a third party developer selected by Forest City will execute the development of the town center based upon this concept plan. The third party developer will make the final determination about variables such as the total square footage, types of uses, number of restaurants, number of buildings, building heights, organization of buildings, configuration of the plaza and what, if any, amenities may be in the plaza, such as a water feature, play area, etc. However, the conceptual direction of the grocer to the east, town center organized around a plaza to the west, with shared parking in between, a pedestrian linkage from the town center to the grocer, and the number of parking spaces will not materially change. Also under evaluation is a pedestrian connection along the drive aisle on Geneva Court.

The goal for this development is for the grocer and shops to open at roughly the same time. This will be subject to the grocer's final approval of the store and the third party developer's success in preleasing a majority of the shop space, as no lender will provide financing for a speculative, (i.e. little to no preleased) center.