

Changes ahead for Larkspur Landing

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Plans are in motion to begin the transformation of Larkspur Landing shopping center, now known as the Marin Country Mart at Larkspur Landing.

Last week, the Larkspur Planning Commission unanimously approved a first wave of improvements, which include landscaping along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, adding new trees, a fire pit, picnic tables, benches, a grassy lawn, raised gardening beds and a play area and wishing well for children. These changes, and others, will be done in phases over the next year or so.

"I think they appreciated my passion for the project, my love for what I do, my love for Marin," owner Jim Rosenfield said. "I think we agree there is potential here, which is really extraordinary - it's just an amazing site."

Plans for the property involve reinventing it in a "country mart" style with fresh paint, a new retail mix and demolition of the center courtyard "hardscape" in favor of landscaped picnic and outdoor eating areas and a children's playground, officials said. The new country mart will feature several public gardens where restaurant tenants can grow their own fruits and vegetables.

Commissioners liked the idea of opening the center up to central Marin's natural beauty.

"He wants to change a lot of the way things will flow in the open areas and give a lot more visibility to the bay and Mount Tam along the East Sir Francis Drake border," said Chris McCluney, planning commission chair.

"He's coming into one of the worst economies ever," he said.



Larkspur Landing owner James Rosenfield is changing the shopping center's name to the Marin Country Mart and plans for a major renovation of the shopping center and a different retail mix of stores. (D photo/Jeff Vendsel)

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"I think the city is fortunate to have this guy come through. I think he has a good vision - he is very keen on having a Marin County kind of feel."

The center was purchased in January by Rosenfield's Santa Monica-based real estate group J.S. Rosenfield & Co. for \$65 million from Inland Western Retail Real Estate Trust Inc., which acquired the property in 2004.

Rosenfield, 46, a resident of Los Angeles who is in the midst of moving his family to Ross, has roots in the Bay Area, having attended the University of California at Berkeley and lived in San Francisco for a time.

His company, founded in 1987, owns large retail centers such as Brentwood Country Mart in Los Angeles and Pride Center and Fallbrook Center, both in West Hills. Also in its portfolio are smaller properties such as Waterworks, a 3,500-square-foot retail building, and Aero Theatre, a single-screen movie house, both in Santa Monica; and a 6,300-square-foot building that houses the furniture store Design Within Reach in West Hollywood.

Owning the Marin Country Mart is a departure for Rosenfield, who typically buys historic properties. Built in 1978, Larkspur Landing, a 16-acre, 173,000-square-foot retail center, features a tenant mix that includes Bed Bath & Beyond, Marin Brewing Co. and 24 Hour Fitness.