



Shopping block

Michigan's newest mall raises ire of local environmentalists

By Emily Friedman

The new Eastwood Towne Center shopping mall in Lansing Township, Mich., has drawn a lot of customers but it has also drawn criticism from area environmental groups.

Dave Dempsey from the Michigan Environmental Council in Lansing said before the mall was built the land was fairly good natural habitat.

"It has been pretty much sterilized of any wildlife. There is no remaining value," said Dempsey. "People do not think of the trees, just the immediate."

He commented that before the Eastwood Towne Center was built, the land had been used for hunting animals like birds and rabbits.

"It was rare to have hunting near an urban area," said Dempsey.

Jason Dinsmore, a wildlife biologist at the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, said the land had been privately owned but hunting was allowed in the past. Before the new mall was built, the previous owner from Detroit banned hunting and leveled the ground.

"There is hunting in metro places around Lansing but that was the closest one," said Dinsmore.

The area was not considered wildlife because it was so close to the freeway U.S. 127, but there were lots of trees, he said.

"There used to be deer where there is now a parking lot," said Dinsmore.



The new mall, sitting on a former wetland and hunting area, has been a topic of debate in the community.

The area also had some extensive wetlands that were good grounds for geese, he said.

John Skubinna of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) said the wetlands were too small to be protected under state law.

"Wetlands in Ingham County are protected if they are five acres or larger and if they are near a water body," said Skubinna.

If a wetland is protected under state law and a developer wants to build on it, the developer must make a wetland in another place. This is called mitigation and the wetland's movement depends on what kind of wildlife it supports and how big it is, Dinsmore said.

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Dave Dempsey, Michigan Environmental Council

Mike Eyde, the owner of Eyde Development, which built the Eastwood Towne Center, said there were no wetlands on the land and the trees were not high quality.

Trees on the land had been timbered 15 years ago and the trees remaining before the mall was built had grown recently, said Eyde.

"Out of 192 acres, only 21 acres of the land had trees," said Eyde. Only 10 percent of the land had trees on it, he said.

A new landscape of trees has been built around the Eastwood Towne Center, said Eyde.

Anne Woiwode of the Sierra Club said even though there was a lot of concern over the building of Eastwood Towne Center, there was little spoken opposition because Lansing Township is small — unless someone lives in that community or was directly affected they might not testify.

When news of the development of the new mall was released, neighbors near the

mall living in areas such as Grosbeck were upset because of the increased traffic.

Recently, complaints have decreased because road construction on Lake Lansing Road has decreased, said Dempsey.

"Local officials are excited about the new tax base but the mall will cause more demand on services," he said.

Eastwood Towne Center will draw people from around the state making other shopping areas ghost towns, said Dempsey. Instead of growth, shopping is just being shifted elsewhere, he said.

Susan Aten, a clerk at the Lansing Township government, said the new mall will provide over 1,000 jobs.

"Meridian Township is worried about the competition that Eastwood will bring because there is already a lot of retail stores in the area and more will lead to urban sprawl," said Woiwode.

The environmental impacts of the new mall include wiping out wetlands, and increasing traffic. Other shopping areas will go out of business leaving empty buildings, said Woiwode.

Eastwood Towne Center will have a positive impact on surrounding businesses, said

the Lansing Township clerk Aten. "There are only two gas stations near the mall and their businesses have been booming," she said.

Because of its location, Eastwood Towne Center will bring in more people, making them more likely to shop in that area more often, said Aten.

Building the mall next to a busy freeway exit was a good idea but there is no justification for it, said Woiwode. The developers built an outlet mall a few miles away from the new mall several years ago, which will cause the two to compete against themselves, she continued.

The outlet mall has been a failure — instead of turning it into an attractive shopping center, they built a new mall, causing more sprawl and waste, she said.

But Aten said the Eastwood Towne Center is the first shopping mall built by Eyde in Lansing Township.

Eastwood Towne Center has been built on an excellent location that is easy to get to, has a lot of visibility and is in the center of town, said Eyde.

"It will be the hottest spot in central Michigan and an asset to MSU students," he said.

Mall sprawl

Lansing's new Eastwood Towne Center is located on Lake Lansing Road at U.S. 127. Four other major shopping centers in the Lansing-area are located within 5 miles of Eastwood.



Randy Yeip/EJ

Lansing Mall doesn't sweat the competition

The manager of the Lansing Mall, Rodney Fairborn, said that he is not worried about competition with Eastwood Towne Center because his mall has been recently renovated, causing business to increase.

"The change is positive and there is enough room for everyone," said Fairborn.

The Eastwood Towne Center does not have a lot of parking and the traffic is bad, while the Lansing Mall has 6,000 parking spaces, he said.

The Lansing Mall has 105 clothing stores and the Eastwood Towne Center has only 18, he said.

"The (entrances to the stores are) outdoors, so it will be hard in the winter," he said.

The Eastwood Towne Center has upscale shops for which consumers in the Lansing area formerly traveled to the Detroit area, so this kind of shopping was leaving the market, he said. In other words, the money was already in the market and now it is being spent in the local area.

The stores that the Eastwood Towne Center has

"The change is positive and there is enough room for everyone."

Rodney Fairborn,
manager, Lansing Mall

are already in local existing malls. "The only new shops they have are Guess, Pottery Barn and Williams-Sonoma, so residents do not have to drive there in heavy traffic unless they want to shop at those three stores," said Fairborn.

Closer to home

Eastwood Towne Center is home to some 64 stores, including many upscale shops that previously had no presence in the Lansing area. They include:

- Ann Taylor Loft
- April Cornell
- Christopher & Banks
- Coldwater Creek
- Banana Republic
- Guess?
- J. Crew
- Jos. A Banks Men's Clothier
- Pottery Barn
- Williams-Sonoma
- Yankee Candle

Photo by Kristen Tuinstra



Rows of sewer pipes behind Eastwood Towne Center await burial.