

Residential Real Estate

Development is chugging along at the massive Thomas Ranch community

Somewhat of a mini city is rising in Hill Country; Grocer wanted



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Construction is ongoing at the Thomas Ranch community close to Spicewood.

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A massive Hill Country mixed-use community appears to be moving along nicely.

With home development and infrastructure construction in full swing, there's plenty more than rooftops ahead for the 2,200-acre Thomas Ranch development and its high-dollar golf community Loraloma.

"We're almost creating a mini-municipality here, in terms of all the infrastructure we're building ... all the way to the service level," they plan to provide, said Joe Rentfro, Areté Collective LP's managing director overseeing Thomas Ranch.

At full buildout, the Spicewood-adjacent community should include 3,500 housing units; 465,000 square feet of commercial space for retail, restaurants and offices; a golf course; a school; health care options; a boutique resort hotel; 1,200 acres of preserved space and two miles of river frontage. Rentfro previously told the ABJ that Thomas Ranch should have multiple housing options and price points.

Loraloma's first phase of infrastructure is expected to finish before this year's end, and first move-ins along with a number of community perk deliveries, including a swimming hole and course-adjacent comfort station, are set for the first half of 2027.

With home construction and utility build-out well underway, Rentfro said getting some of Thomas Ranch's commercial acreage online is one of the next looming priorities. "We're probably the last destination retail area in this part of West Austin, and so we'll have a pretty broad service area," he said, as other developers also target the Spicewood area for new neighborhoods. He expects upwards of 1,000 homes to go up close to the community.

The company intentionally scheduled development to start in the neighborhood's northern and southern edges, which will directly border the mix of restaurants, retail and hospitality eventually planned.

"We can work on live, work, play all at the same time, rather than try and ... crescendo value on commercial after the residential's built out," he said.



Thomas Ranch will be host to 3,500 housing units, 465,000 square feet of commercial space for retail, restaurants and offices, a golf course designed by renowned course designer, school and healthcare options, a boutique resort hotel, 1,200 acres of preserved space and two miles of river frontage.

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With almost half a million square feet of commercial space open for just about every community-supportive use under the sun, he said he's hoping to land a grocer for Thomas Ranch soon. He said the neighborhood is an example of how he and Areté aim to be placemakers, not just developers, as homebuyers across the metro seek out the "15 minute community," where their neighborhood has personal and professional opportunities all in walkable distance.

"It's almost going back to ... the quaintness of a lot of 1920s or 1930s communities ... really bringing an old-school form of land planning back as a new invention," he said. "I think people would love to ... have the vibrancy of amenitization in their community that lets them shop local, that lets them eat local, and lets them have gathering places to meet neighbors. It's one of the struggles in a lot of communities. You may live amongst people but never commune with them."

The vision for an all-encompassing development naturally includes education. Thomas Ranch lands in bounds of the Marble Falls Independent School District, but Rentfro said he's working to court an innovative, most likely private or charter education provider for the neighborhood.

"We continue to just really look for ... the right school partner," he said. "What we would love to create here, as well with the education component, is something that's so deeply integrated with the community that some of those facilities might be able to be shared and utilized when school's out of session."

Along with Wasatch Premier Properties' plans for The Oakley, which is set to start construction this month, another parcel pegged for multifamily development is under contract. That deal would add about 400 age-targeted units into the mix of approximately 1,300 housing units already in motion.

As for Baylor Scott & White Health's longstanding plans, it's still not entirely clear what kind of service they will bring to the table, but he said executives seem keen to diversify their medical offerings in the Hill Country.

"This is a landing spot for them and their healthcare network growth going forward," he said.

An important though less forward-facing progress marker for the project is its mix of utility-focused progress, including their now-operational water treatment plant.

As the community continues to come into focus, Rentfro said he and Areté are committed to an "authentic approach" to developing their corner of the Hill Country. He looks forward to seeing residents connect with the landscape and appreciate all of the area's planned and natural beauty.

"You're not looking at the project in isolation of just housing ... you really got to leapfrog into the future and push and pull on all the levers that end up creating the magical place that attracts," he said. "You've got to have vibrant restaurants and entertainment and shopping experiences, or you're really just creating a suburban housing community. That's the antithesis of what we're trying to do at Thomas Ranch."