

All Up In Your Business What you should know about Costco

**Jay Socol, Natalie Ruiz
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- Jay Socol: Welcome to All Up In Your Business. I'm Jay Socol.
- Natalie Ruiz: I'm Natalie Ruiz.
- Jay Socol: Welcome back, Nat!
- Natalie Ruiz: Thanks, thanks.
- Jay Socol: You and I haven't recorded anything together since October.
- Natalie Ruiz: What?
- Jay Socol: I think because, well, number one, you don't like being around me, but number two, things are, as Aubrey would say COVID-y.
- Natalie Ruiz: COVID-y.
- Jay Socol: Things have been COVID-y. So earlier this week we dropped a podcast episode that talked a lot about what's new and what's coming, the stuff we usually do. And part of that talk with Aubrey Nettles, our Economic Development Manager was about how an announcement was coming regarding an almost 19-acre tract of commercial property owned by the city of College Station in Midtown.
- Jay Socol: So we told the listeners and viewers just hang on because more info is coming later. Well, later turned out to be way sooner than we expected. So here we are. So with that in mind, Nat, tell us more about what we hope is coming to College Station's Midtown area.
- Natalie Ruiz: So the city has a roughly 57 acres that's on the frontage of Highway 6 that we've been marketing as commercial for quite a while. We have been working with Costco Wholesale on a location in Midtown in College Station. One of the reasons why we're not ready to declare victory just yet is because there's still more steps to go through this process, right? It's a piece of property that the city owns. So our city council still will need to consider the real estate contract, the economic development agreement. There's still pieces of this overall puzzle that still need to come together.

Natalie Ruiz: But the big news is that Costco is interested in developing in College Station and we're working with them on a site plan. The size of the building's roughly 160,000 square feet, will have a fueling center out front and will be very similar to what they have in the Cypress area.

Jay Socol: So that site plan has been filed with the city?

Natalie Ruiz: It has been filed. It was filed on Wednesday.

Jay Socol: That's a good positive sign. Generally, we wait for that until we even talk about anything as relatively possible.

Natalie Ruiz: Right. Right. You want to at least — when I'm working with someone on a piece of property, I want to see that they're serious and they've invested money and time in developing that piece of property. So they have been working with their civil engineer team to put the site plan together and that's what we're getting ready to review. And so we wanted to make that announcement that we're working with Costco very closely over the next few months and putting all the pieces of this puzzle together to bring a Costco to College Station.

Jay Socol: And I know there's a lot that we can't talk about yet, but hopefully we'll be able to and in the coming weeks. But can you talk about anything related to the journey from an economic development standpoint that you have had with these folks?

Natalie Ruiz: So I can tell you more from a personal standpoint, right? I mean, I've been back with the city, gosh, a little over six years now and when we started this retail recruitment program, it was about a little over five years ago. And we wanted to really find what it was that our residents were leaving the community for to buy. What are those things that people were driving to Houston for? Costco is on the top of that list. And so we put together as part of our recruitment program what are those restaurants we would like to recruit? What are those retailers?

Natalie Ruiz: And you have those whales of the industry and that's what Costco is. They were at the top of our list. And so there were some initial cold calls that happened and we developed a relationship with the folks at Costco. It was someone that I felt personally could anchor that entire Midtown development from a retail standpoint. Costco is the type of retailer much like some of your other large retailers that attract from the larger region. It's not just a neighborhood Costco. They recruit from a much larger area, but we've been having that conversation about, "Hey, do you know

where College Station is? Have you thought about one in College Station? Here's why it makes sense to be in College Station."

Natalie Ruiz: So we've had that for a long time now. Anytime you deal with a large corporation, whether it's Costco or a local restaurant, they all have their process that they go through and what they're looking for in terms of a new location. And so working with them on a piece of property that the city owned, we were able to answer a lot of those questions very early on. So we have been working for months on all of the specifics of this deal and putting it together. And this is just the first step in a longer process through the summer to iron out the specifics.

Jay Socol: And I'm taking a wild guess here, but I assume that some of the factors that they consider are surely location and visibility and traffic count. Maybe it's rooftops in proximity. Maybe it's average household income. I mean, am I close? Are those some of the things that they look at?

Natalie Ruiz: Those are the things that all large retailers look at. I don't really want to go into as to what specifically Costco looks for. But any major retailer's going to look at that in terms of visibility, in terms of the number of the traffic counts in front of your store, the number of rooftops within several miles of your facility.

Jay Socol: Okay, okay. And you talked about this being kind of a shopping destination for really this whole area. With the amount of tourism that this community generates, whether it's related to Texas A&M activities or the sports tourism that our own city generates, I would have to think something like that in this location would be worth pulling off of Earl Rudder Freeway for. Yeah?

Natalie Ruiz: Well, I certainly think so. And at least from a sports tourism standpoint, I could at least speak from a mom, right? When we go to a baseball tournament or a softball tournament for one of my kids, there is always a stop at Academy. We've forgotten something. We need a cooler. There's always something that someone forgot. And I know that happens here. The last football tournament we had here, Academy was packed during that time. So we're expecting the same thing for Costco to be perfectly honest.

Jay Socol: Okay. So lay out for me sort of the sequence of events moving forward.

Natalie Ruiz: All right. So they just submitted their site plan. We'll start reviewing that at the staff level and processing that making sure they're in compliance with all the codes and ordinances like we would for any other

development. Because this is a city-owned piece of property. There's a real estate contract and an economic development agreement that goes to our council. Right now, the time frame's end of April. We'll take that through. There will also be an infrastructure agreement because as I mentioned, we have the 57-acre tract. We're participating in some of the infrastructure as part of this deal, because you can't just build part of a detention pond or part of a waterline.

Natalie Ruiz: All of that has to be built concurrently and so we're working through that and getting estimates and putting that piece together that will go to council later this summer. And then after that, we're hoping we'll get to the permitting phase and hopefully get them under construction just as soon as possible.

Jay Socol: That sounds good. What else do folks here need to know? And I realize again this is a great announcement, but it's somewhat preliminary. It's very early on. Is there more that you can share or anything that you want to do to sort of temper expectations moving forward?

Natalie Ruiz: So you and I have always talked about when we started this podcast, is it a thing? Is this a thing? And Costco definitely... Do we want it to be a thing? Absolutely. But is it a thing just yet? Not quite. There's still more steps in the process that we need to go through before they will break ground. And so for me, it's not a thing until they're out there pushing dirt. Right?

Jay Socol: Makes sense. Okay, so are we good?

Natalie Ruiz: I think so.

Jay Socol: Okay. Now, if you haven't listened to or watch the podcast episode with Aubrey and me talking about all the things coming to College Station, make sure you do that. And you can find all of these episodes that we've done on Podbean, Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Spotify, iHeartRadio, Stitcher, and YouTube. So we'd love for you to do that, to rate, review, subscribe, all of that would be awesome. And tell a friend or family member to do the same. Final thing, if anyone wants to know more about how to locate their business in College Station, Natalie, who do they contact?

Natalie Ruiz: Contact myself, Natalie Ruiz or Aubrey Nettles through our website at grow.cstx.gov.

Jay Socol: Okay. Sounds great. Natalie, thanks a bunch.

Natalie Ruiz: Thank you.

Jay Socol: Thanks everybody. We'll catch you next time.