

Academy Sports + Outdoors extends major commercial development in South Stratford area

By Richard Craver [Winston-Salem Journal](#) | Jun 23, 2018



Academy Sports + Outdoors entered the Winston-Salem retail market last week confident in its ability to differentiate itself not only in product mix but also in location.

The retailer chose to skip crowded Hanes Mall Boulevard for a build-from-scratch location a short distance away at the new Burke Mill Village shopping center off South Stratford Road.

Academy, based in Katy, Texas, is known for selling at a lower cost brand-name hunting, fishing and camping equipment, patio sets and barbecue

grills, and sports and recreation products.

It has 249 stores nationwide, including in Burlington, Greensboro, Hickory and 10 others in North Carolina. The local store will have about 100 employees.

The Academy store, at 3467 Burke Mill Road, also expands major commercial development south of its epicenter on Hanes Mall Boulevard and Stratford Road. The location, however, is still only a few minutes from two of Academy's competitors — Dick's Sporting Goods and the revived Gander Outdoors — in "the more-the-merrier" tradition of convenience and drug stores.

Academy is serving as the 67,000-square-foot anchor tenant at the shopping center, which has a Guitar Center under construction. Other tenants will include Viva Chicken, a small restaurant chain based in Charlotte that recently signed a lease to bring its brand of Peruvian rotisserie chicken to Winston-Salem next year.

Other retailers have not yet been identified.

"We know that Hanes Mall Boulevard and Stratford Road is the retail place to be in Winston-Salem," said Brandon Privette, Academy's store manager who has similar managerial experience at the local Dick's Sporting Goods store.

"We believe we will benefit over time from having access to the traffic flow but also representing an easier entrance and exit than fighting mall traffic."

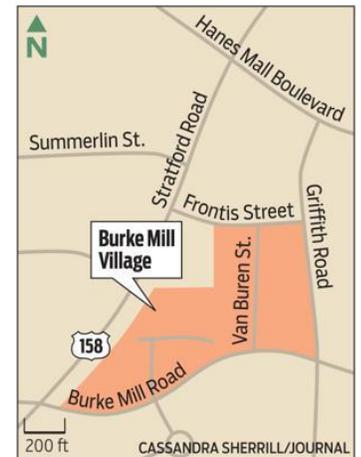
Privette said Academy's business model emphasizes that it "a store for the everyday person, and not a discount store or for the sporting elite."

"We want to help customers buy the supplies and equipment they need and still have money left over to enjoy their experiences," he said.

Southwest Suburban Area Plan

In February 2017, the Winston-Salem City Council approved the rezoning of the 10.8-acre site to general business, allowing for a 90,900-square-foot shopping center with up to 454 parking spaces.

The Academy complex wasn't necessarily the goal of a June 2015 change to the city council's Southwest Suburban Area Plan, which sought a mixed-use development for the site.



The area plan covers properties generally bordered by Ebert Road on the east, Muddy Creek on the west, the Davidson County line on the south and, to the north, by sections of Silas Creek Parkway, Business 40 and U.S. 421 to where it crosses Muddy Creek.

Mixed use, in this instance, represented integrating pedestrian-oriented commercial, office and multifamily housing development.

“The idea of that was to transition from the intense, all-commercial emphasis of the Hanes Mall Boulevard area to noncommercial office and residential uses farther south along Stratford Road and residential along Griffith Road,” said Paul Norby, the city-county planning director.

“An area plan is intended as a guide for future land use/zoning decisions, and not a legal mandate that it must be that way,” Norby said.

He said the Academy rezoning was aided by the developers’ willingness to revise the site plan “to show more of a lifestyle arrangement of commercial uses along Burke Mill Road.”

“This introduced a softer, more pedestrian-oriented portion of the development at that southwestern edge along Burke Mill Road,” Norby said.

“The development is still all commercial and not mixed use, but the change was made by the developers to help address some of the concern that it was too harsh a transition to just have a big-box store all the way down to Burke Mill Road,” he said.

The revision also included the developers proposing a landscaped “rain garden” at the corner of Burke Mill and Stratford and a new traffic signal and pedestrian crosswalks at the main entrance off Burke Mill Road.

‘Extremely sensitive borderline’

City Council Member Dan Besse, whose ward includes the part of the plan area inside the city limits, said in 2015 that the South Stratford area represents “an extremely sensitive borderline” between the intense development on Hanes Mall Boulevard and residential areas like Atwood Acres.

Letting development move farther down Stratford, Besse said, could set off a domino effect that could convert “block after block” to commercial development.

According to the 2015 updated plan, most of the area’s southern section should develop as residential on large lots — lots of at least 5 acres — while most of the area to the west of Stratford and without frontage on a major road should be single-family residential on smaller lots.

Industrial areas would be on parts of West Clemmons Road and sections of Griffith Road over toward South Stratford Road.

The plan says that areas around such places as Hanes Mall and Hanes Mall Boulevard should include apartment housing and more pedestrian-friendly features, such as sidewalks.

Roger Beahm, the executive director of the Center for Retail Innovation at the Wake Forest University School of Business, said the store’s decision to place itself within a 5-minute drive of two big competitors (Dick’s and Gander Outdoors) means having the opportunity to attract shoppers already planning to go to one of those two destinations.

“While time can only tell if the decision to add Winston-Salem to its list of markets is going to be a good business decision for Academy Sports + Outdoors, the presence of another brick-and-mortar retailer offering quality-brand merchandise at discount prices can only be seen as a good thing for consumers in this market,” Beahm said. “One thing is for certain, selection and pricing on sports and outdoor gear should remain competitive in this part of the city for some time to come.”