

Bethesda developer pitches rare retail-only project in Woodmont Triangle



A range of retail-centric options are being floated for this site, which sits at the corner of Auburn and Norfolk avenues, including this one envisioning two-story, multi-tenant retail.

DOCHTER & ALEXANDER RETAIL ADVISORS



By [Daniel J. Sernovitz](#) – Senior Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
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Story Highlights

- Rock Creek Property Group will pursue a retail-focused project for a site in Woodmont Triangle.
- The developer acquired the Norfolk Avenue site for \$3.25 million in October.
- Dochter & Alexander Retail Advisors markets the site to potential single or multitenant operators.

A Bethesda developer is proposing to do something that's virtually unheard of these days: build a purely retail project.

Rock Creek Property Group late last year acquired a site at the northeast corner of Auburn and Norfolk avenues in Bethesda's Woodmont Triangle, with the aim of developing either a single-story or two-story retail project. It's retained Dochter & Alexander Retail Advisors to market the development to interested prospects. In marketing materials, Dochter & Alexander pitches a range of scenarios, from a single-story user seeking between 15,000 and 40,000 square feet to a two-story multitenant building with outdoor seating potential.

The developer acquired the property at 8011 Norfolk Ave. for \$3.25 million in October from the DBT Development Group, which had previously proposed building up to 84 multifamily units over 5,000 square feet of retail on the site. DBT and its partner, NoVo Properties, struggled to get that project out of the ground, prompting its off-market sale to Rock Creek, per Sam Hollman, senior director of acquisitions at Rock Creek.

Rock Creek hasn't entirely ruled out that previous scenario. But the financing market for that kind of project is extremely challenging right now, while demand-driven retail in a market like Bethesda should be a whole lot easier to get out of the ground. What's more, he said, the corner lot marks the outer edge to

Woodmont Triangle, and street-facing retail could play off the property's location as a gateway leading down Norfolk Avenue toward Woodmont Avenue, past Marriott International Inc.'s headquarters, before it connects to the busy Old Georgetown Road corridor.

"We think this particular corner can be something that truly activates the neighborhood," Hollman said.



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This scenario depicts a single-story retail building in the foreground and a second level stepped back from the corner of Auburn and Norfolk avenues.

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Rock Creek has retained D.C.'s Nahra Design Group, behind projects including the commercial portions of Amazon.com Inc.'s HQ2 and West End, the redevelopment of the former Landmark Mall, to design its planned retail project.

Dave Dochter, a principal and co-founder at Dochter & Alexander, said he sees the potential for a transformative project at 8011 Norfolk Ave., tapping into spill-over demand from other properties like Bethesda Row. The demand is there, too, based on recent leasing activity and pending deals he has in the queue at other properties in the area. Agora, BabyCat Brewery, Call Your Mother and No Regrets Pizza are just a few of the new or pending additions to Bethesda's restaurant scene.

"I think it's a unique opportunity, where you get to have retail lead the charge," Dochter said. "There's a wide net of operators, and the demand is really fantastic. I think the timing's spot on."

How soon the site gets developed is subject to variables including the complexity of the preferred development option. A single-story design-build option would require only minimal approvals as a by-right development under county regulations. But a more detailed development could take longer to secure approvals. Also for those reasons, Hollman said it is too soon to disclose potential development costs.

"What we've been charged with is to try to identify what's going to fit with the community, activate the project, and drive the most economic viability out of the project," Dochter said.