



## REI IMAGE

An artist's rendering of a project similar to the REI complex planned for Flagstaff shows multiple levels of apartments above a strip of stores. (Courtesy art)

A century after Flagstaff's downtown merchants lived in apartments over their stores, mixed-use development is returning to the city in a big way.

A 23,550 square-foot REI store selling recreational equipment will be located at Aspen Place at the Sawmill at the corner of Lone Tree Road and Butler Avenue. Part of the latest phase of development at the shopping center, the store will be near downtown Flagstaff and Northern Arizona University.

Above it will be built 222 luxury apartments. And on either side will be 35,000 more square feet of retail space.

REI alone promises to hire 50 people, but at least one local sporting equipment retailer questions the need for another national chain store in Flagstaff.

### \$2 BILLION RETAIL CO-OP

According to Elaine Averitt, planning development manager for the city of Flagstaff, the site plan on the 1.43-acre site was approved on May 30 and construction began in August.

REI will be joining Cultured, Pita Jungle, and Some Burros as part of Phoenix-based RED Development's efforts to make Aspen Place at the Sawmill a "lively and comfortable shopping and dining experience that complements the northern Arizona lifestyle."

"We're confident in creating a balanced mix of local and national retailers to serve the needs of the residents and visitors throughout Flagstaff," said Stephanie Whitlow, director of marketing and communications for RED. "REI joining the mix is a testament of retailer interest in Flagstaff, and we're committed to delivering a vibrant retail and residential experience at Aspen Place."

REI is a \$2 billion national multichannel retail co-op headquartered outside of Seattle with more than 5 million active members. Although anyone may shop with REI, the company is the nation's largest consumer cooperative — members pay a one-time \$20 fee and receive a share in REI's profits through an annual member refund. There are more than 4,200 members in the Flagstaff area.

"We're excited to join communities that are magnets for those who love the outdoors," said Rachel Ligtenberg, REI regional vice president. "Whether enjoying activities close-to-home or farther away at a national park, we look forward to preparing people for their outdoor adventures through great gear and knowledgeable staff."

The store will offer gear and apparel for camping, climbing, cycling, fitness, hiking and travel, a bike shop and a community space for outdoor-related classes, presentations and events.

#### IS THERE A NEED?

With 129 stores in 32 states, including locations in Tempe, Paradise Valley and Tucson, and a large online store, REI raises questions with local shop owner Katy Peterson about why there is a need for a store in Flagstaff.

"The local customers that I've chatted with have all agreed that it's easy to shop at REI right now," said the owner of Flagstaff Sports Exchange. "We're not against REI, but the locals all agree, Flagstaff just isn't the town for a big box store. That's important to me because I want the city to see that we notice the difference between business-friendly and local business-friendly."

Gail Kirkland, retail director for REI's South District, says she's heard similar concerns as the company has grown over the past five years, specifically in Asheville, N.C., where they set up shop in 2008.

"We were one of the first big national retailers to come in to Asheville, and I can happily report that in the last five years we've experienced shops coming in and opening after we've moved in," Kirkland said. "We are finding in other communities as well that when we come in, we really serve as a conduit for people to be engaged in the outdoor community."

REI will also mean highly coveted outdoor jobs in Flagstaff, the bulk of which will go to current Flagstaff residents.

“We’ll probably have 50 to 55 jobs to offer the Flagstaff community. A lot of times when we move in to a community we try to fill the management team with folks from the community because they are truly the experts within the market.”

Andrea Labelle, owner of Flagstaff Jean Company at Aspen Place, sees the new neighbors as a positive for her business.

“I’m excited. I think this plaza is amazing and it’s actually filling a gap in Flagstaff that we don’t have,” Labelle said. “Most of my customers tell me that they love not having to drive to Phoenix to go shopping. In my belief, it’s helping to bring our shopping tax dollars to Flagstaff instead of losing them to Phoenix.”

## NEW RESIDENTIAL OPTIONS

The apartments at The Village at Aspen Place are expected to be available in 2015. Alliance Bank will also join the property in summer 2014, according to a press release.

“We recognized that demand is strong in Flagstaff for new residential options,” Whitlow said.

The residential building will offer views of the San Francisco Peaks with 1- and 2-bedroom floor plans available.

“We feel like the Village at Aspen Place Luxury Apartments will complement the shopping and dining amenities available at the property, creating a setting unlike anything else in Flagstaff.”