

Features

Walnut Creek Retail Revs Up as Year Winds Down

Third quarter 2018 marked the lowest downtown Walnut Creek vacancy rate in more than a year as it dropped to 4.5%, and veteran retail broker John Sechser makes a break for TRI Commercial amid growing development.

By **Lisa Brown** | December 14, 2018 at 04:00 AM



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WALNUT CREEK, CA—Third quarter 2018 marked the lowest downtown **Walnut Creek** retail vacancy rate in more than a year. Vacancy dropped from 4.6% in the second quarter to 4.5%, according to John Cumbelich & Associates' third quarter retail report.

The downtown market continues to attract new-to-market users, with retailers such as Blaze Pizza and Madison Reed signing leases in third quarter. Heritage Eats, a Napa Valley-based concept, also opened during the quarter.

As existing vacancy continues to absorb, there are significant new retail developments either underway or ready to break ground in the coming fiscal year, says the report. And with Broadway Plaza's ongoing construction decreasing due to the third quarter completion of the new Apple Store, additional construction is anticipated as new downtown retail inventory breaks ground.

The Foundry, a 27,545-square-foot European-style food hall, continues to make progress. The Foundry's proposed site is located on Walnut Creek's busy Locust Street across the street from Century Theatre. And, Broadway Plaza's new 75,000-square-foot Lifetime Fitness facility is underway, receiving approval from the Walnut Creek planning commission earlier this year.

Net absorption ended the quarter at 3,450 square feet and vacancy in the historic downtown north of Mt. Diablo Boulevard increased from 10.8% to 11.3%, according to the Cumbelich report. The historic downtown's share of overall vacancy remained stable in the quarter, carrying over 54% of the overall market from second into third quarter. Vacancy rates there have continued to rise since third quarter 2016, as the center of gravity for retail and dining has shifted to the remodeled Broadway Plaza. With vacancy increasing in the historic downtown, additional retail assets will be repurposed to mixed-use development.

With all of this retail activity buzzing in Walnut Creek, it seems to be the place for veteran retail real estate brokers. John Sechser is certainly that. He is a well-known fixture on the commercial real estate scene, having spent numerous years at Transwestern, Colliers International, Grubb & Ellis and Bishop Hawk.

And now, Sechser has joined the team at TRI Commercial/CORFAC International, according to president Tom Martindale. His expertise includes retail leasing as well as representing retail tenants with site selection requirements, and negotiating leases and investment sales. Sechser's new position at TRI is East Bay retail services managing director. He was most recently a senior vice president/director of retail operations with Transwestern in Walnut Creek. **Ed Del Beccaro** managed that office until joining TRI Commercial a few weeks ago as executive vice president and East Bay regional manager.

"I have known John Sechser for many years as a man of integrity and always a top producer. We are thrilled to have a consummate professional such as John join our East Bay team," Del Beccaro tells GlobeSt.com. "The retail business in the East Bay is thriving and John is a great addition to TRI Commercial."

Since 1981, Sechser has worked extensively with retail tenants as well as retail property owners throughout the Bay Area, later concentrating on the East Bay. Recently, his work includes marketing the retail space at several mixed-use projects in Walnut Creek.

The Lyric, located between North California Boulevard and Locust Street on the north end of Bonanza Street, has 18,000 square feet of ground-floor retail with 141 apartment units in three-, four- and five-story buildings.

1380 North California Blvd., the former McDonalds, will have 10,300 square feet of retail with 97 apartments above it; 22 of which will be Airbnb-style short-term rental residences.

1716 North Main St., which will be 42 executive-style apartment homes above 2,700 square feet of retail.

Alamo Drafthouse, Maya Cinema, Fuddruckers, Las Montanas Market, Patio World, Philly Cheesesteak and Denica's Real Food Kitchen are some of the retail tenants Sechser has exclusively represented. He also has development experience, having worked as a partner in developing Brentwood Junction, a 65,000-square-foot retail center anchored by Best Buy and Walgreens, and Brentwood Station, a 75,000-square-foot retail center, both in Brentwood, CA.

After several years with Bishop Hawk in San Jose beginning in 1981, Sechser transitioned to the Grubb & Ellis Company where he spent 13 years building his retail real estate career. He joined Colliers International in 1999 and was an integral part of building its retail business before joining Transwestern in 2012 to help open its Walnut Creek office.