

# Engineers help Target overcome challenges presented by unique site

BY CAROL MARSHALL  
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The demographics stacked up to make the site on the west side of Telegraph and Square Lake an attractive one for retailer Target to build a new store on. It has the high traffic counts retailers like and it's situated in a dense and affluent area of Oakland County. But the site is not without challenges.

"It's basically a triangular site, so it made for what I'm calling some fun opportunities," said Jim Miller, Target senior design project architect.

Designing the site around two zoning designations, dealing with multiple governmental bodies and road commissions, working around a wetland and designing a large retail location on a site with a 25-foot grade fall-off have lengthened the project's timeline and added to its expense. But in October, the Target store will open there, and it will open on time.

"Primarily despite its geological challenges, it just has a great presence, with the access off Telegraph, and with the demographics around the location," Miller said. "Starting there and going north, it acts as a great retail gateway that continues up Telegraph."

Engineering firm Giffels-Webster has been working on the site for three years, helping Target to manage site planning and the environmental considerations. Right from the beginning, challenges crept into the plans, said Giffels-Webster associate Paul Modi and President Keith Mayer.



From left, Paul Modi, associate, and Tim Currie, project manager, of Giffels-Webster. | COURTESY GIFFELS-WEBSTER

## Zoning

The 12-acre site on which the Target store broke ground last summer is a mixed bag, with 8 acres being zoned for commercial use and 4 acres zoned for residential. The engineers on the project recommended the use of the residential outlots for items such as storm water detention and for the heavy landscaping required by the Bloomfield Township Planning Commission.

The store and the outside parking lot will be situated on the commercially zoned property.

"The township has elevated landscaping and setback requirements," Mayer said. "There is a lot more green space than you would typically have at other retail lots because the township places a lot of importance on screening the residents from commercial. They put strong emphasis on the quality of life of their residents."

What the planning department and commission prefer, in order to shield residents from commercial uses, is substantial earth berms and planting mass, Mayer said.

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Keith Mayer, president,  
 Giffels-Webster

## Design requirements

Not every Target design includes stone, full brick and mahogany, but this one does. The township called on the project's designers and architects to soften the look of the big-box store.

"It's not your typical Target. I had heard it's one of the most unique Targets in the

country," Mayer said.

"When we design a store, we always use high quality materials that will age well, but in this case the design standards were pretty high. We used real stone and full brick instead of veneers, and we use this European product that looks like mahogany wood panels," Miller said. "There is a material richness to the palate and the way we've articulated the structure. It's kind of a standard that's above and beyond the vast majority of our other stores."

The township also required a landscaping plan, which Miller describes as lush.

"It looks like a nursery out there," he said. "It will be stunning."

## The site

The site's grade was uneven, with a 25-foot drop. Engineers and designers took an unusual approach – at least one that's unusual for retail.

"We needed to make sure the grading worked for the building and the parking,"

Modi said. "Some of the parking is underneath the building – actually about three quarters of it is."

The store will offer 586 parking spots, 300 of those in an underground parking garage.

"If you drive up to a typical Target, it's a massive one-story building. This one, you actually get into the building by escalators," Mayer said. For a Target – and for most retailers – that is unusual, though it's common in office uses.

Shopper preference, visibility from the roadway and expense usually prohibit underground retail parking, but Miller said it has its benefits.

"While we are a vehicle society that prefers to get into our cars and see where we're going from our cars, we've found that once people understand how this kind of building works it's very well received," he said. "Our demographic is fo-

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Rendering of the new Target planned at Telegraph and Square Lake. | COURTESY

## TARGET ▶

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cused on educated women with children, so we have a lot of moms with kids who shop at Target. In a climate like Michigan, when you don't have to be out in the snow or the cold in the parking lot, it can be very positive."

To manage some of the grading issues, a portion of the excess dirt was used to construct one of the large berms required by the township.

"Typically with a lot of grade differentials, you have to move a lot of dirt. Anytime you have to move earth off site, or

import dirt, that's big bucks, unbelievably expensive. It could easily have been many hundreds of thousands of dollars to move that dirt to another area. Putting in the berm fulfilled the need for screening on the west side. It also allowed the general contractor to dispose or stockpile some dirt," Mayer said. "Then on the other side of the site, there is a wall separating Target from residents."

One of the site characteristics is a large wetland on the northwest corner.

"That was a major hurdle. With the major earth disruption, there is a lot of effort put forth to protect the existing wetland area," Mayer said.

It is not technically a state-regulated wetland, but the township's requirements for protecting it are just as high, Mayer said.

Incorporating the use of bio-swales – vegetation, plant material and stone arranged to mitigate erosion – will help filter out small particles and keep them from being transported to the wetland.

The township also required 25 percent of the site to be green space, compared to the more typical 10 percent to 15 percent at most locations.

### Multiple authorities

Because the Target site is situated on roads governed by three separate agencies – Telegraph Road is a Michigan Department of Transportation highway, Square Lake is an Oakland County road and the road to enter the site is township-controlled – there was three times as much government interaction as on a more typical site, which slowed progress.

"When you have to put access points in any MDOT right-of-way, it complicates the issue," Mayer said. "It's a drawn out process with MDOT. They're very stringent as to how many locations have access points, due to safety issues."

Those issues are complicated by multiple projects nearby, each in various stages of development – a 44,000-square-foot LA Fitness location and the SmartCar USA headquarters, which opened earlier this year. In March, Costco, located to the east, won approval to demolish its 124,000-square-foot store and replace it with a 153,000-square-foot store. And there is the massive Bloomfield Park, located nearby on 70 acres in Pontiac and 5 acres of Bloomfield Township.

The project is taking longer than the standard Target store, Miller said.

"The township has a very distinct, defined guideline for us to adhere to. The planning department and planning commission were very clear on what the requirements were," he said. "And given how close we are to the residential component, we took some very deliberate discussions with the neighborhoods. With that said, though, it's all adding up to make it an extremely professionally developed, high quality project."

■ Carol Marshall covers real estate for Oakland Business Review. She can be reached at (248) 374-4920.

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