

Outlet mall awaits final decision

By **MARK OUELLETTE**

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MERRIMACK — With the planning board's unanimous acceptance of a site plan application for a 608,916-square-foot outlet mall with 135 retail shops, planners have a 65-day window in which to make a final decision on the project.

Planners will put the entire site plan up for engineering review over the course of the next two months, and barring an extension filed by the involved parties, the board can either choose to approve it, approve it with conditions or deny it. Should the developer be granted final approval, work could

begin at the site as soon as September.

In recent years, New Jersey-based developer Chelsea Property Group has been pitching the outlet mall plan, which has been met with both acceptance and criticism by residents in town. Abutters to the site have raised several concerns ranging from blasting to traffic coming to and from the area.

Planning Board Chairman Nelson Disco has said the review process will be conducted the same as with any other project, but that answer doesn't sit well with some who live near the proposed construction site.

"This is not like every other site plan," said Beth Burns of

neighboring Spruce Street. It's not like the Wrentham mall or Pheasant Lane Mall. It's much bigger than that."

The project is anticipated to span two phases: The first phase would create 430,000 square feet of leasable space and the second consists of developing an additional 120,000 square feet. While boutique shops and high-end retailers would be established in the first phase, hotels and restaurants would be included during phase two.

Gordon Leedy, an engineer for Bedford-based Vanasse Hangen Brustlin representing the developer, deemed the application "very complete" when

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it comes to the various documents concerning architectural, landscaping and lighting plans for the site.

Merrimack Village District has suggested Chelsea construct a

\$1.7 million to \$2 million water pipe to ensure an adequate water supply plan is in place. Chelsea and the village district have not reached an agreement that has been made public.