



Site plan review continues on outlet mall

By MARK OUELLETTE
New Hampshire Union Leader Correspondent
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MERRIMACK – Round Three of the site plan review for a proposed outlet mall takes place tonight in the town hall courtroom.

The planning board is considering New Jersey-based developer Chelsea Property Group's proposal to bring 135 Merrimack Premium Outlet shops to 170 acres on Commerce Drive, situated off Industrial Drive and near Exit 10 of the F.E. Everett Turnpike.

After finding Chelsea' various reports as "substantially complete" on June 3, the site plan review process began June 17.

Barring an extension filed by one of the parties, planners have 65 days from the initial June 3 application acceptance to make a decision on the large-scale retail project.

If approved, construction may begin as soon as this fall.

Tonight's meeting, which is open to the public and starts at 7 p.m., continues the July 1 session.

Water-quality and blasting -- two issues raised by Concerned Citizens of Merrimack Alliance, a group comprised mostly of abutters who oppose the project -- may be addressed, according to planning board Chairman Nelson Disco.

Those issues weren't discussed at the last meeting because of the unavailability of some of the town's consultants, he said.

In its plans, Chelsea wants to clear about 11 acres and relocate dirt to the north end to build a slope.

The developer has agreed to avoid using ammonium nitrate fuel oil on the western end of the property closest to a residential wellhead.

A pre-blast survey will also be conducted at the homes that fall within a 1,000 foot radius of the project.

Gordon Leedy, an engineer with Bedford-based Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, representing the developer, has said the outlets would be built in a "New England motif" and incorporate other architectural elements, including monument signs, towers at the entrances and LED-lighted signage.

Merrimack Premium Outlets would feature multiple boutique-style shops, including Burberry, Coach, J. Crew and Calvin Klein, and have 1,160 part-time and 250 full-time jobs.

The estimated increase to the tax base is more than \$850,000.

A second phase is planned to include a hotel and four restaurants at a separate location on the site, Leedy said.

If planners do not make a decision on the project today, a fourth site plan review session is scheduled for Tuesday, July 22, at 7 p.m. in the courtroom

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