



## Merrimack planners near outlet mall decision

By MARK OUELLETTE  
Union Leader Correspondent  
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**MERRIMACK** – The site plan review for a 135-store outlet mall may come to a close tonight, when the planning board anticipates deliberating and possibly making a decision on the retail project.

Vice Chairman Pete Gagnon had said before the Sept. 2 session that a decision on the project pitched by New Jersey-based developer Chelsea Property Group was possible. However, discussions on blasting and rock crushing operations ran late into the evening, leaving planners with no other choice but to seek another extension from the developer.

For the third time in recent weeks, Chelsea granted an extension to allow the planning board additional time to address lingering concerns related to the project, which, if approved, would be constructed west of Exit 10 off the F. E. Everett Turnpike on Commerce Drive.

Chelsea, which first went before planners with the outlet mall proposal in September 2004, received a conditional-use permit from the planning board after its traffic, economic and fiscal reports, to name a few, were deemed "substantially complete" on June 3.

The site plan review, under way since June 17, will continue tonight when the board meets at 7 p.m. in the courtroom near town hall.

Mike Mills, a member of the Concerned Citizens of Merrimack Alliance, a group largely made up of abutters opposed to the outlet mall, asked planners at the Sept. 2 meeting for more time to review recent submittals by the developer and its consultants.

Nelson Disco, chairman of the planning board, said it would be premature to close the public comment portion of the process until all items related to the project had been dealt with. However, he also said that tonight's session could be the last chance for abutters and residents to provide input before public hearings are closed and the board's deliberation begin.

When the time comes for the planning board to arrive at a decision, it can choose to approve the project unconditionally, approve it with conditions, or reject it outright. If approved, Chelsea has said it plans to begin construction of the 608,916 gross square feet of boutique-style shops on the 170-acre parcel this fall.

According to Chelsea, an estimated 800,000 to 1,000,000 cubic yards of rock material would be blasted at the site for several months. The developer would conduct a pre-blast survey for

homeowners that fall within 1,000 feet of the blasting area; however, some residents have requested it be extended to roughly 2,500 feet.

Meanwhile, construction of the outlet mall could take about 18 months, said Chelsea. As part of future plans, which would need to be approved by planners, restaurants and a hotel may also be built near the retail complex.

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