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Thursday, February 9, 2006

**Rochester Shoppes is a go**

By ADAM D. KRAUSS  
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ROCHESTER — The Flatley Company gained approval Monday to build the Rochester Shoppes, the 325,000-square-foot neighborhood shopping plaza just off Exit 13 of the Spaulding Turnpike.

The Planning Board, having seen the project just two times prior to the vote, was unanimous in its support for the project, heralded by city staff as a major addition to a community that is experiencing serious commercial and residential growth.

The board amended the precedent conditions at the company's request so that it can have one year, not six months, to gain all of the necessary state transportation and environmental permits and a total of 18 months, not one year, to obtain a building permit.

The company still expects to begin both site work and off-site work in summer 2006 and have the plaza opened between spring and summer 2007.

Richard Cane, Flatley's regional director of real estate planning and development, said the changes give the company greater flexibility in finalizing plans with the state. A certificate of occupancy will not be granted until the off-site work is complete.

The company is investing \$2.6 million in road improvements, both to Route 202 and the Exit 13 interchange, including about \$1.7 million that would have fallen on the state's shoulders.

The improvements include widening Route 202, including two westbound left-turn lanes into the center, and extending Pine Lane to the center's entrance, which will have traffic lights. It has not been decided if the company is going to pave the portion of Florence Drive, which leads to Pine Lane, below the extension.

A new highway southbound on-ramp to the turnpike will be constructed and improvements will be made to the existing northbound on-ramp, which will eliminate the stop sign there and provide an acceleration lane. The ramps will have coordinated traffic lights with the plaza's entrance lights.

The company is also extending the sewer line from the Shell gas station to its site, which will allow for projects further down the road to hook in as well. A dam permit is needed for the site's detention pond.

During the public hearing, Chesley Hill Road resident Don Gilbert questioned why the board would approve the project without considering the traffic impacts to the west of the site that were laid out in the city's consultants report, which was partly paid for by Flatley. He said that alone would be grounds to get a Superior Court judge to stay the project.

The company's traffic impact study has the site generating about 1,375 trips during the peak hour on a weekday and about 1,885 trips during the Saturday midday peak hour.

The Public Works Department supported Flatley's traffic mitigation plans based on the report by CLD Consulting Engineers. "It ties into plans under development by the city for improvements to Washington Street, including the proposed traffic signal at Brock Street," DPW Commissioner Melodie Esterberg wrote the board, adding further review would be "superfluous."

City Manager Bob Steele addressed the board, saying any requests to have the company mitigate impacts to Route 202 heading toward Barrington — including the intersections with Chesley Hill and Dry Hill roads — should have been brought up earlier in the process.

The site is to be anchored by Lowe's, at 171,069 square feet, and Kohl's at 68,890 square feet. There are three other retail locations, three spots for restaurants and one for a bank. The company has not announced the other tenants, though they have said they will be of national prominence.

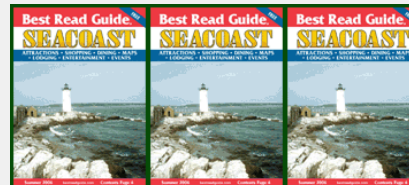
Attorney Malcolm McNeill, who is representing the company, said the Lowe's is going to incorporate elements never seen before in the Northeast. "It mimics and improves the Epping Lowe's design," he said. Cane said the Kohl's building design has good character with its recessed front entrance.

The board previously voted against designating the estimated \$35 million project at the 49-acre site a "development of regional impact." The approval concluded more than a year of work between the company and city to turn the area that was previously called "the rock pile" into a



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Company officials have said the plaza will create construction jobs and 400 employment opportunities for people young and old. They have said it will result in an estimated \$650,000 in additional tax revenues to the city, representing a 6.25 percent increase in its commercial and industrial tax base and a 1.25 percent increase in the total assessed valuation.

Alternate board member Lynn Williams said the project is a "big boost" to the city. She complimented the company for its presentation of the project.

Economic Development Manager Karen Pollard, who has attended all of the project's meetings, complimented the board for the way it handled the project and said the approval signals to companies eyeing Rochester that the city is willing to work with developers for a common good.

"We're pro-business, as long as you work with us," she said. "Flatley came to the table prepared to work with the city. We were looking for that partnership, and the partnership between the developer and the city, and even the state in this case, came together very well."