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Monday, May 28, 2007

High above Route 16, massive retail project takes shape

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ROCHESTER — Standing in the middle of an active construction site, one wonders if the shoppers who will frequent The Rochester Shoppes will ever question how the building for their favorite store got here, or how the land was altered to make way for a massive parking lot, or how ledge was carved out for a future highway access ramp?

After all, it's the clothes, home furnishings and restaurant food that has gotten people excited for the anticipated October opening.

But the process of building a roughly 305,000-square-foot shopping mecca with national retailers is one of, literally, satellite coordination, old-fashioned grit and mastery of plans. It features men and women lugging equipment, and trucks capable of running through walls gingerly sharing the land with workers on foot.

Here in the Lilac City, at the southwest corner of the Spaulding Turnpike's Exit 13, the site is a



John Huff/Staff photographer This composite photograph displays 160-degree view of The Rochester Shoppes site off the Spaulding Turnpike in Rochester.

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hive of activity as at least 50 workers with Severino Trucking stand on ground that's high enough to make passing vehicles below resemble miniature toy cars.

Working with dozens of unaffiliated tradespeople, they have been tasked with building the latest big shopping plaza to be associated with The Flatley Company, the Massachusetts firm with the international reputation that recently sold its shopping center portfolio to companies from Boston and New York.



It's an undertaking perhaps best understood by looking at the numbers. Since workers got on scene in October 2006, about 70,000 cubic yards of ledge has been blasted, 50,000 cubic yards of gravel has been put to use, and 100,000 cubic yards of dirt have brought the site to grade.

Each day, excavators, bulldozers and an assortment of trucks consume about 2,000 gallons of fuel, around 70,000 gallons of water is used for dust control and compaction, and estimates have 3,500 cubic yards of loam being spread in the coming weeks.

John Huff/Staff photographer Crews excavate thousands of cubic yards of material and prepare for changes to the turnpike itself at the Rochester Shoppes site in Rochester.

It only took nearly 7,000 concrete blocks to build the fortress-like retaining wall at the front of the site along Washington Street.

Like tiny mountains, boulders ranging between 2,000 and 5,000 pounds sit in piles awaiting the pulverizing pressure of a hydraulic excavator and, finally, a

machine that separates the dirt from stone. The equipment thunders and rattles with such force that even a distant inspection can prove too close for comfort.

"We haven't stopped hammering yet," Tom Severino, vice president of the Candia company, said on site Wednesday afternoon.

It's more than an understatement to say the site looks different than when real estate mogul Thomas Flatley and city officials announced the plans in the summer of 2005. Back then, trees gave shadow to gigantic rock piles left over from years of starts and stops of site work. Today, even someone vertically challenged can feel like a giant as the back part of the site is about 15 feet higher than the main road.

Chunks of earth were removed and recycled into fill. "Economically it's the only way that you can feasibly have these projects take place," Severino said. "There's a limited amount of natural resources of sand and gravel and ledge material that we can get to the site, so that helps us preserve the economies of those materials."

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The project — a \$35 million venture to be anchored by Lowe's and Kohl's and feature Famous Footwear, Maurices, Fashion Bug, Starbucks, other retailers and restaurants — was approved by the Planning Board last year.

Three walls of the nearly 69,000-square-foot Kohl's are up. Work on the 171,000-square-foot Lowe's building, with a later opening date, is expected to start early next month, but its foundation was already taking shape across about four acres of land on top of about six feet of fill.



John Huff/Staff photographer Rocky material from The Rochester Shoppes construction site is pulverized into gravel for multiple uses on the location as construction continues along the Spaulding Turnpike in Rochester.



On

John Huff/Staff photographer Excavating equipment reclaims material from The Rochester Shoppes site off the Spaulding Turnpike in Rochester, which will be crushed into various types of gravel and reused.

Wednesday, workers were busy widening Washington Street. Gas lines were being laid, and it became clear just how much more pavement there will be — big enough for dedicated through lanes for traffic into the site and the new Pine Lane Extension, which itself is taking shape across the street with cleared trees.

Site work was continuing for the new southbound ramp to the turnpike. A Severino employee was coordinating ramp work with the help of global positioning satellite technology. Others worked on a 50-foot-wide section on the side of the turnpike.

The new ramp presently measures 1,200 feet, long enough for embarking motorists to gain steam before and after becoming visible to other drivers. Once it opens in the fall, the existing southbound loop ramp will be removed, shifting turnpike lanes to give northbound motorists entering from the Exit 13 ramp at Washington Street more room to merge onto the turnpike without having to brake at the stop sign.

The ramps will be changed even more when the state widens the turnpike from Exits 12 through 16, officials say.

There's still no word on which restaurants will occupy the site. They're expected to move in about six to eight months after the plaza's October opening.

Richard Cane, Flatley's regional director of real estate planning and development, was on site Wednesday. In the past, he's usually been found meeting with officials in City Hall, going over the details of the endeavor.

"This is what I consider the fun part of the job," he said, "because it takes you anywhere from 12 to 24 months to design it and get it through the approval process and now we see the fruits of our labor."



John Huff/Staff photographer Rocky material from The Rochester Shoppes construction site is pulverized into gravel for multiple uses on the location as construction continues along the Spaulding Turnpike in Rochester.

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