

Mall demolition work to resume next month

Written by Steve Ostermann
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Developer tells village that razing, site clean-up will be done by late June

After nearly a two-year delay, demolition of the former Manchester Mall in Grafton is expected to resume next month.

Village officials were recently notified that E.J. Plesko & Associates, the Madison company overseeing the Highland Ridge redevelopment project at the 22-acre site, plans to resume razing the last two mall buildings by April 12, Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said.

According to a timeline released by the firm, demolition work will also include abandoning utility lines, asbestos abatement, backfilling basements, cleaning up the site and removing temporary fences. Those operations are expected to be completed by late June, Hofland said.

E.J. Plesko's announcement follows complaints from area residents about the appearance of the site, which is west of Wisconsin Avenue and south of Falls Road and has been earmarked for a two-phase redevelopment project.

The first phase — construction of a 61,000-square-foot commercial complex anchored by a Pick 'n Save grocery — has been completed. However, work has yet to start on the second phase, which calls for construction of 136 owner-occupied condominiums in a 17-building complex on 14.5 acres.

The demolition began in summer 2008 but was halted within several months and has not resumed even though the last two stores — Feed Bag Pet Supply and Dunham's Sporting Goods — have closed. The remaining buildings are fronted by a fenced-off area containing rubble and construction equipment.

Hofland said the project, which E.J. Plesko is developing with Residential Homes of America, was put on hold because the sluggish economy sparked concerns about the condo-townhouse market. The developers, he said, told the village they expect to present a revised concept plan for the second phase of the project to the Community Development Authority this spring.

David Gevers, director of development for E.J. Plesko, said a new plan was being prepared but declined to provide details.

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The demolition work will again include on-site shredding and crushing of building materials to reduce the amount of debris that has to be transported, Hofland said.

E.J. Plesko was required to get approval from the Plan Commission for an on-site demolition permit, which has expired. However, a new permit can now be issued by the village staff pending a review by the building inspection department, Hofland said.

“The village had been in contact with the developer, who kept us updated on their plans,” he said. “Approval of all permits is expected.”

John Gassert, chairman of the Community Development Authority, said he and other CDA members are anxiously awaiting word from E.J. Plesko on the future of the project’s residential phase.

“It’s something that has not been brought to the forefront for quite a while, and we are concerned about it,” Gassert said.