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Village expects site of former shopping center to be cleared by end of July, awaits word on housing project that hasn't begun

Cleanup of the former Manchester Mall shopping center on Grafton's south side is nearing completion, but future redevelopment of the site remains in doubt, according to village officials.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said E.J. Plesko & Associates, the Madison company overseeing the proposed Highland Ridge housing project at the site, is expected to finish cleanup work by the end of July.

The work — which was delayed for more than two years before resuming in March — included razing the last two mall buildings, abandoning utility lines, asbestos abatement, backfilling basements, crushing and removing debris and taking down temporary fences.

"All buildings have been demolished, and the crushing and disposal of materials is continuing," Hofland said last week.

E.J. Plesko resumed razing and clean-up operations after area residents complained about the appearance of the site, which is west of Wisconsin Avenue and south of Falls Road and has been earmarked for two phases of redevelopment.

The first phase — construction of a 61,000-square-foot commercial complex anchored by a Pick 'n Save grocery — was completed.

However, work has not begun on the second phase, which calls for construction of 136 owner-occupied condominiums in a 17-building complex.

E.J. Plesko received village approval in 2008 to complete the $38 million Highland Ridge project with Residential Homes of America.

Plans called for the developer to take out a building permit by fall 2008 for at least one multifamily building to mark the start of residential work, but that was not done because of the struggling condominium market, Hofland said.

"In light of the current state of the economy, it's understandable that they have not pursued the next phase," he said.

In March, David Gevers, director of development for E.J. Plesko, said his firm was considering new options for the Highland Ridge project but declined further comment. He could not be reached this week for an update.

An agreement with the village requires the developer to meet deadlines for residential construction that will increase the property value
of the project site. In lieu of meeting deadlines, the developer must pay the village to cover any

tax shortfall.

This year, the village received $76,656 to cover a 2009 shortfall by a Jan. 31 deadline, Hofland said.

In 2010, the developer is required to complete redevelopment that will add $3.5 million in value to the project site or pay another $70,000 to cover the shortfall, Hofland said.

Any revised plans for the second phase of the Highland Ridge project are expected to be presented to the village's Community

Development Authority for review. However, village officials said they have yet to receive any word from E.J. Plesko.

"The master plan was approved to complete the vision of multifamily redevelopment and remains unchanged," Hofland said.