



Williamsburg Outlet Mall to be revamped as neighborhood center

'Lightfoot Marketplace' would be anchored by Harris Teeter

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A rendering of a pharmacy at the new shopping center that would replace the Williamsburg Outlet Mall. (Bonstra/Haresign Architects / Virginia Gazette / October 11, 2013)

JAMES CITY – The struggling Williamsburg Outlet Mall could be reinvented next year to host a Harris Teeter, a pharmacy, at least one restaurant and additional retail and office space if a plan pending before county officials is approved.

The master plan and special-use permit calls for the current 230,000-square-foot building to be razed to make room for a series of five new buildings in a neighborhood shopping center dubbed "Lightfoot Marketplace," said Paul Gerhardt, a Kaufman & Canoles attorney representing contract buyers, Williamsburg Retail Investors.

The five buildings would total 136,134 square feet, Senior Planner Ellen Cook noted. Two of the buildings would be entirely commercial, and the other three would be a mix of commercial and office space, she said.

"It'll be very attractive," Gerhardt said. Washington, D.C.,-based firm Bonstra/Haresign Architects has partnered with local firm Guernsey Tingle on plans that incorporate classic elements in a modern design intended to be consistent with the nearby Thomas Nelson Community College's Historic Triangle campus and James City's Law Enforcement Center.

The current building at the corner of Richmond Road and Centerville was built in 1982, according to James City's property records website. Gerhardt said back then, enclosed malls were popular with shoppers. Over the years, consumer behavior has changed to prefer open-air designs.

"Times have changed," he said. "People want to be outdoors and want more green space. Hopefully we end up with a very attractive replacement."

Other than Harris Teeter, no other leases have been announced. "The leasing agents are working to identify tenants who would be new to the area," he said.

The contract buyers have also spoken with college officials because a large part of the center's consumer base would likely be students, Gerhardt added.

County and state agencies have completed a preliminary review of the project and are waiting for Williamsburg Retail Investors' response. The Planning Commission could review the case as early as November. The site does not need to be rezoned but needs a special-use permit because of the amount of traffic generated and the square footage, Cook said.

The current owners announced this spring that the outlet mall would close at the end of the year, after one last holiday season. Aside from changes in consumer preferences, the mall was hard hit by the recession, uncertainty in retail markets and overbuilding in the area.

The 19-acre site's assessment and sales history tracks its decline. The site was sold in 1989 for \$16.87 million, but by 2003 the sales price had dropped to \$5.2 million. It is currently assessed at \$9.87 million.

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