

Bal Harbour Shops shows latest plans for expansion

By Rodolfo Roman

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The Bal Harbour Shops unveiled its latest expansion plans last week, but some village residents remain concerned about how the project would affect traffic.

The Bal Harbour Shops hosted a workshop on May 12 at the Sea View Hotel to present the mall's latest proposal, which is expected to cost \$300 million.

The mall wants to add 350,000 square feet of retail space, including 250,000 square feet of additional or expanded specialty department store space, and at least 20 retail boutiques, along with a high-end theater, a multipurpose community plaza along Collins Avenue and multiple locations for public green space. It would also build a new, 61,000-square-foot church for its neighbor, the Church by the Sea, on a site behind Village Hall.

Matthew Whitman Lazenby, operating partner of Bal Harbour Shops, said the community's opinion played a major role in the plans presented at the workshop.

"We've been trying to gather feedback from the residential community in Bal Harbour, and it's taken us 2 ½ years to craft a plan that we think responds to those concerns we've heard," he said at the workshop. "Today was the great unveiling to the response to those comments."

Lazenby's grandfather, Stanley Whitman, founded Bal Harbour Shops in 1965. About 2 ½ years ago, Bal Harbour Shops held its first public meeting to introduce its concepts for expanding the mall. Since then, Lazenby said, Bal Harbour Shops has received

hundreds of comments and suggestions from residents, and has worked to accommodate them.

Those who attended last week's meeting heard from architects and a traffic-study consultant, and viewed an animation of what the new Bal Harbour Shops could look like if the village gives it the green light. Bal Harbour Village Council members and some administrators were among those who attended.

'Not like a village'

Resident Claire Hausman said she liked what she saw, but was concerned about the village's reputation.

"Everything you have shown us is exceptionally beautiful, but I maintain it is no longer the exclusivity that Bal Harbour has always had worldwide." She later added: "The plan is so large, it's not like a village now and it's looking like a condo on Collins Avenue."

Lazenby said many mall tenants have requested additional space.

"We want to grow the shopping center to accommodate both existing and perspective tenants who need more space," he said.

Marc Perlowitz of Barneys New York, a chain of exclusive department stores, said his company is considering opening a store in the Bal Harbour Shops and that quick action by the Village Council would "assist us in our final determination."

Benefits seen

New resident Lisa Austin said expanding the mall would benefit the village.

"I think this will turn into something world-class," she said. "I not only look forward to going there but the extraordinary increase in my property value."

However, some residents said they were concerned that the traffic would become unbearable. One of them, Arthur Gellman, said he was not satisfied with the proposed plan.

"The problem with the presentation is that we were led to believe that it included peak traffic," he said. "But in reality it doesn't include the traffic it generates during Christmas sales, which is the most devastating. Last year, it took about 10 to 15 minutes to get out of your condo."

Lazenby said he is certain the new plan will meet those demands.

“Our traffic consultant plan was not to figure out how traffic will impact our expansion, but can we do it better than we are today, and we believe that the plan that we proposed will be better even after we expanded,” he said.

The expansion could be completed as early as 2018 if the Village Council approves it.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/05/19/4125064/bal-harbour-shops-shows-latest.html#storylink=cpy>