

## Hamilton Mall plans to expand by nearly a third

By JOEL LANDAU Staff Writer [pressofAtlanticCity.com](http://pressofAtlanticCity.com) /  
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HAMILTON TOWNSHIP — Owners of the Hamilton Mall are proposing a 305,468-square-foot expansion that will add new stores, restaurants and an anchor store to the region's largest shopping center.

The expansion would be the first for the ownership group Hamilton Mall LLC since the center was built about 25 years ago.

The construction would be done in two phases. Plans for the first phase include:

Two 7,000-square-foot restaurants near the front entrance of the parking lot where the road is a circle.

A 63,000-square-foot shopping center between JCPenney and Macy's capable of housing more than half a dozen businesses

A 9,000-square-foot center that would be a mix of retail and restaurants.

For the second phase the mall has plans for a 219,468-square-foot department store on land behind JCPenney. That space would add an as-yet-unnamed anchor store to the roster of Sears, JCPenney and Macy's.

The next step in the proposal happens Thursday night, when the township's Planning Board will be asked to give preliminary approval on both phases and final approval on the first phase.

There is no timetable yet for construction.

Mall General Manager Bill Schu declined comment on the proposal, saying the owners are waiting to hear feedback from the township.

The mall is approximately 1 million square feet but the original plan called for about 1.3 million square feet, said township Economic Development Director Phil Sartorio. The original plan also had five anchor stores, he said.

Sartorio said the mall has considered these plans for a few years, but is moving forward in light of new competition from other shopping centers along the Black Horse Pike.

"Like anything else, they need to refresh and update," he said. "It's part of the evolution of the market."

The mall is assessed at more than \$93 million, according to tax records.

The construction would change some of the aesthetics of the mall.

Shops would be built in front of JCPenney. The proposed 63,000 square foot shopping center would have more of a strip mall appearance, as people could enter the stores from the outside instead of entering the mall.

Under the plan, the mall would also add sidewalks and pedestrian access from the pike into the mall, Sartorio said.

With the closing of neighboring Borders and the current economic climate, Deputy Mayor Charles Cain said he was encouraged by the mall's plans for expansion.

"The mall has been a quality business and asset to the township," he said. "What they are proposing will bring new amenities to appeal to the entire community."

Cain said he didn't know what new stores the mall would bring to fill the new space.

Cain, who also sits on the Planning Board, said he will want to hear whether the mall and the Pinelands Commission have reached a resolution on a storm basin facing the pike. The basin has had issues with flooding.

"If the mall addresses that, it would be a great situation," he said.

Meanwhile, at the mall, shoppers were excited about potential new stores and restaurants, as well as the prospect of more jobs.

"It's OK by me," said Mays Landing resident Dorothy Fidler. "If you're retired and don't have much to do, it's more places to go in and look at."

Danielle Passarelli said the Hamilton Mall is still smaller than other malls in South Jersey such as Cherry Hill and Deptford.

"It would be cool to have something new," the Port Republic resident said. "We can always use more stores. A big department store would attract more people."

Vineland resident Kevalyn Corley said she hopes the new businesses are more affordable than the current places at the mall.

"It would be nice to have something new and up-to-date," she said. "We have the same stores year after year. The smaller stores inside don't seem to last."

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