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FEATURED

## Henrico Planning Commission recommends approval of redevelopment plans for Regency mall

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A rendering shows a plaza that Regency mall's owners would create if Henrico County approves a rezoning request for the site. Plans also call for an apartment complex. *Cooper Carry Associates*

The Henrico County Planning Commission voted unanimously Thursday to recommend approval of plans that the owners of Regency mall hope will revive the aging shopping center.

The commission voted on a rezoning request that will allow residential development and a broad array of commercial uses after a public hearing in which a majority of speakers endorsed the project.

The mall's owners, The Rebkee Co. and Thalhimer Realty Partners, originally planned to continue operating the indoor shopping mall when they purchased it in 2015, but they are now looking to redevelop the property as a contemporary, high-density urban town center, with up to 1,250 residences. Regency has struggled to maintain its legacy as one of the region's premier shopping destinations, as online shopping and new malls, such as Short Pump Town Center, have squeezed out older sites.

As retail companies are no longer a solid option for keeping the mall viable, the developers have made plans to build a NOVA indoor aquatics center and a Surge trampoline adventure park within the next three years.

Many people who live, work or own property near Regency see the projects and the rezoning as an opportunity to revitalize the area.

"I think you're crazy if you don't approve it," real estate agent Blake Eudailey told the Planning Commission on Thursday.

A few people, however, did speak against the project, raising concerns about the impact the development could have on traffic and schools.

"I'm concerned how we're going to phase the density of this," said Terry McIlwain, who lives near the mall. "I'm curious as to how that's going to happen. That's my biggest concern, the density they're talking about adding to the site."

The master plan submitted with the rezoning and provisional-use permit requests envisions an open-air town center, with buildings as tall as 120 feet toward the center of the 35-acre site.

The requested zoning designation and drawings for the site are similar to what's in place for several other newer developments in Henrico, such as Libbie Mill and West Broad Village.

A public hearing for the Regency project was originally scheduled for last month, but the developer asked for it to be delayed in order to dial back the allowed maximum building height from 250 feet to 120 feet.

The owners had considered asking for the higher building height to try luring a big company to locate its headquarters there, but determined that it could still be feasible with a shorter building.

The first phase of the project, according to the developers, will begin with the redevelopment of the old Sears building, which will be replaced with a 285-unit, four-story apartment complex.

The developers have said renting the apartments would cost about \$1,200 to \$1,500 per month.

While some people have questioned why the county is willing to approve the rezoning request without the developer having a development plan ready, Planning Commission Chairman Gregory Baka said it should set up the developers for success.

"We need to support the revitalization of Regency," he said. "I think some flexibility is good. It allows creativity and initiative to succeed and flourish here in Henrico."