

# Planners OK first phase of mall renovation

## Quaker Bridge expansion to begin in December

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**LAWRENCE** — Developers looking to expand and renovate Quaker Bridge Mall got the go-ahead from the township planning board to undergo stage one of their plan.

Stage one will include the demolition of the J.C. Penny and construction of a larger J.C. Penny, measuring 140,000 square feet, and a three-story parking garage.

The expansion is expected to include upgrades to a bus stop on the rim road beside the J.C. Penny.

Construction is expected to start in December. Developers Simon Property Group Inc. and Kravco Simon Co., collectively known as Lawrence Associates, hope to expand the mall by more than 50 percent, to 1.6 million square feet from 1 million square feet, in two phases. Phase one got unanimous approval from the planning board Monday.

An anticipated consequence of the expansion, according to developers, are new sustainability initiatives such as more efficient chillers and boilers that would use less energy to cool and heat the mall. On Monday, the planning board attempted to negotiate large investments in energy-saving measures, but settled for less as the developer said its available funds for the project were uncertain.

"I think you've got a developer here who's interested in the environment and sustainability," said engineer Joseph Vilante, who testified for the development companies.

Members of the board were concerned that Vilante could not guarantee the planned sustainability improvements will definitely be implemented.

"This is a huge opportunity and we are anxious to make sure that all the resources you have and (the township has) will be brought to bear on sustainability," planning board member Pamela Mount said.

How to ensure this was the lengthiest debate of the night, with the developers and engineers representing Lawrence Associates assuring the board they would do as much as they could and the board trying to secure some solid energy commitments.

Ultimately, the Lawrence Associates were only able to say they anticipate meeting more than 50 percent of the board's energy recommendations.

"I think this is a great start," Mount said. "It's very encouraging that you're trying to conserve as much energy as possible."



Lengthy debate also ensued over safety at the bus stop to be built by J.C. Penny – the only bus stop at the mall. Pedestrians will have to cross the four-lane rim road that runs around the entire mall to get to and from the bus stop.

Safety measures, such as an island, crosswalk or light, will be put in place as warranted by the number of users, developers said.

Some members of the board took issue with this, however, saying they should protect pedestrians trying to cross the four-lane road, regardless of how few there may be.

"Were taking people, human beings, and putting them in an inherently dangerous situation crossing four lanes and seeing what happens, using them as guinea pigs," board member Phillip Duran said.

The board, with Lawrence Associates, eventually agreed the matter would have to be deferred for now. The board asked Lawrence Associates to see if NJ Transit, which will operate the buses coming to the stop, would be willing to place the bus stop on the other side of the road, so pedestrians would not have to cross traffic at all.