

Miami Herald

Posted on Wed, Oct. 09, 2013

Bal Harbour Shops submits plans to expand

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CHARLES TRAINOR JR / MIAMI HERALD FILE

Shoppers walk past the PRADA shop in the Bal Harbour Shops.

Decades in the making, Bal Harbour Shops submitted two sets of redevelopment plans to the village on Wednesday, laying out options for expanding the luxury shopping center, including enlarging its existing Neiman Marcus store and adding a third anchor.

The goal: to add 250,000 square feet of retail space, including 100,000 square feet of department stores, and at least 20 specialty retail boutiques, along with a luxury theater and two new parking garages for Bal Harbour Shops; while building a new, 60,799 square-foot church for its neighbor, the Church by the Sea.

“The objective of the plan is to respond to the needs of the market and to make sure Bal Harbour

Shops remains as compelling a destination tomorrow as it has for the last 50 years,” said Matthew Whitman Lazenby, president and chief executive of Whitman Family Development, owners of Bal Harbour Shops.

Filing jointly, Bal Harbour Shops and the Church by the Sea submitted applications for two alternative development plans: one that would expand the shopping center within the footprint of land it already owns and controls, including the Church by the Sea (which it has an option to buy), and another one that would also include purchasing and moving Bal Harbour’s village hall. That enhanced plan includes infrastructure and aesthetic improvements for the village, Lazenby said.

Both of the proposals call for the Church by the Sea to be relocated to the northwest portion of the property owned by Bal Harbour Shops, in an agreement reached after years of often heated negotiations that resulted in an amicable conclusion. Lazenby’s grandfather, Stanley Whitman, who founded Bal Harbour Shops, started discussions with the church even before he opened the shopping center in 1965, Lazenby said.

Bal Harbour Shops, home to Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue, as well luxury boutiques like Chanel and Gucci, for years has wanted to expand to accommodate its luxury tenants’ needs for added space, and to welcome prospective tenants. The shopping center currently has 450,000 square feet.

Lazenby said the redevelopment plan translates to a total investment of about \$200 million. The expansion would be completed as early as 2016.

South Florida lures shoppers from all around the world, and Bal Harbour Shops' desired growth is one of several major retail developments in the works for Miami-Dade County. Miami's Design District is currently undergoing a transformation into a luxury shopping destination, which has attracted some of Bal Harbour's tenants, and plans are underway for a new Brickell CityCentre, of which Whitman Family Development is a partner.

Whitman, 94, who has been involved in Bal Harbour since it was incorporated in 1946, has wanted to expand Bal Harbour Shops for decades, Lazenby said.

Nearly two years ago, Bal Harbour Shops held its first public meeting to introduce its concepts for expanding the center. Since then, Lazenby said Bal Harbour Shops has received hundreds of comments and suggestions from residents, and has worked to accommodate them.

In the meantime, the village passed a charter amendment prohibiting it from selling or disposing of village property without a referendum. Therefore, Bal Harbour Shops has come up with its alternative development plans. No date is yet set for the council to discuss them.

Lazenby said Bal Harbour Shops recognizes that it needs to make a compelling case to the village of why it should allow it to acquire its site.

"That is the case we are making in the expanded amenity plan," he said, "which includes us acquiring the village hall site and therefore has us giving a lot back to the village in return — above and beyond building a new village hall on our dime, which we said from the beginning we were going to do."

In addition, Bal Harbour Shops has eliminated plans to create a social catering venue that could be used for charity events, parties or fashion shows, because of residents' concerns of traffic congestion, Lazenby said. Bal Harbour Shops has also made changes regarding planned access points.

To create an enhanced master plan, Bal Harbour Shops has hired Zyscovitch Architects, Leo A. Daly Architects, Raymond Jungles Landscape Architects, and consulting architects Maria Sellek and Mark Hampton.

"We have tweaked the plan meaningfully," Lazenby said, "so it's responsive to what we heard at that last meeting and during the ensuing two years."