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Project of the Month: Bierbrier Development begins permitting and leasing for Needham Street Village Shops

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Bierbrier Development has begun permitting and leasing for its latest village retail center located on Needham St. Upon closing on the first two parcels of a three-property assemblage, Bierbrier recently submitted its initial plans to the Newton zoning officials for Needham Street Village Shops at 55 Needham St. at the northern end of this highly desirable retail corridor. Partnering with Atlantic Retail Properties for leasing, Tighe & Bond for engineering, and Prellwitz-Chilinski Associates as the architect, the Bierbrier project promises to bring some of the best new construction in years for small retailers along this very busy thoroughfare.

Needham Street has flourished as a retail corridor serving the needs of Newton and Needham residents and become a highly trafficked corridor for western suburban commuters with destinations in Newton and east to Boston. Because of its mix of traffic, Needham St. has long been a highly sought-after location for retailers. Until now, retail uses along the corridor have relied largely on reuse of historic commercial and industrial buildings that have bordered Needham Street since the 1950s. The Needham Street Village Shops promises to bring a design appeal that may lead the way for a transformation of the corridor into the type of shopping and pedestrian center long sought by planners and property owners alike.

According to Len Bierbrier, president and owner, the inspiration for the design of the project, and the "village retail" concept that his company is pursuing, is Bierbrier Development's successful Arlington Village Shops on Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington, Mass. "We have found that addressing the desires of city planners, retailers and consumers is possible and successful. Our design concept focuses on first locating projects in dense, established retail clusters that are struggling with the desire to become 'mixed-use' hubs but still require significant parking for successful retail businesses."

To meet the needs of residents and shoppers, Bierbrier focused on urban streetscape design that locates the retail buildings along the vehicle corridor with well-designed storefronts and pedestrian walkways. Ample parking for shoppers is located to the rear with store entries facing the parking. "We believe that keeping our building depths short enough allows us to locate necessary parking in a concealed location that provides convenience to the shoppers and gives the high-visibility frontage desired by retail operators," said Bierbrier.

Bierbrier said he believes that his embrace of these concepts is leading to a cooperative approval process as well. "In keeping with previous efforts, we also plan on the Needham Street Village Shops being LEED Silver rated. We have found a very warm reception thus far with the zoning and planning officials with whom we have met."

Bierbrier has also teamed with some of the most successful retail experts in the Newton market. Prellwitz-Chilinski designed Bierbrier's Arlington Village Shops and has served as the architect of

other major retail centers in Massachusetts, such as Legacy Place and the newly renovated Chestnut Hill Shopping Center in Newton. In addition, Bierbrier has hired Atlantic Retail Properties of Boston as its exclusive leasing agent. Atlantic has leased significant space in Newton, representing some of the largest landlords and retailers. Other team members include Bob Vanasse of Vanasse & Associates engineering, David Boyarsky of D.A.B. Brokerage and Appraisal Services, who managed the assemblage, and Alan Schlesinger of Schlesinger & Buchbinder, who served as land-use counsel.

"We have a very dynamic team that has helped us put together what we believe is a new style of project to address today's retail needs," says Russ DeMartino, VP of Development at Bierbrier, who is tasked with rolling out the Village Retail program. "Needham Street Village Shops allows us to bring together the design of a main-street retail corridor with the parking essential to suburban shopping, all with a location that mimics a downtown mixed-use center."

Bierbrier's project is located within steps of the highly successful Avalon at Newton Highlands, which has nearly 300 high-end apartment units, and at a very convenient intersection of Needham and Winchester streets. The design is largely in keeping with Newton planners' long-term vision for a Needham Street corridor that provides for pedestrian-friendly design. Bierbrier anticipates permitting to continue for the balance of the year with store openings slated for the fall of 2013.

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