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Southern New Hampshire retail market forecast: Deals will be sprouting in spring 2019 - by Andrew Levy

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Another winter has come and gone. Thank God. Bring on the SUN!

Though there was a fair amount of activity this fall and winter, we do need things to heat up (literally) in Southern New Hampshire.

New Hampshire's retail picture is healthy and growing with a lot of new construction in several key markets. Occupancy rates remain high, and most centers have only a few vacant units. Smaller spaces are seeing a decent amount of general in-fill from a variety of tenants. Some are expansions or relocating, and many are new start-ups.

Chris McMahon of Summit Realty Partners just announced Core Medical Group has leased 27,000 s/f, and joins Popeye's, Kung Fu Tea, and Glossy Nails as the newest signed leases for The Shoppes at 655 So. Willow St., in Manchester. Perry Snow of NAI Norwood Group completed a 5,000 s/f lease to a new state-of-the-art Days Jewelers on Amherst St. in Nashua.

On bigger boxes there a fair amount of shuffling with new tenants taking over former defunct stores. Newly created big box vacancies have become opportunities for off price, deep discount, and new to N.H. concepts. Case in point: Ocean State Job Lot just purchased six Toys "R" Us locations including the prime South Broadway site in Salem bringing their N.H. store count to 16. In Nashua, Sierra Trading Co., and HomeSense have just opened stores at Royal Ridge Mall on Spit Brook Rd. and DWH will also open in Bedford on South River Rd. joining Kohl's, Marshalls and Staples.

Many of the "new" players coming into N.H. are in the restaurant, entertainment, and fitness categories. Planet Fitness continues to open new locations in N.H., the latest being in Salem on So. Broadway in the Bobs Discount Furniture space. Bob's moved into bigger digs in the former Shaw's unit. OrangeTheory Fitness is opening new locations, and a new concept NH-"Spenga" has found its first location in Nashua.

It's very common today to see Yoga studios and other boutique fitness players like Pure Barre and

others in neighborhood strip centers.

Other large space users growing in N.H. are family entertainment businesses such as Altitude Trampoline Park and Fun City U.S. Both have just opened in former Shaw's Supermarket in Merrimack and Goffstown. Altitude Trampoline Park is also in Pelham and at the Steeplegate Mall in Concord in a former Circuit City store.

Extreme Craze Inflatable Air Park & Ultimate Laser Tag and Southern New Hampshire Gymnastics Academy just opened in the former Home Goods store in Londonderry at the Shaw's Apple Tree Shopping Center on Rte. 102. Recently purchased by Vernet Properties of Salem, Mass., a complete renovation and repositioning is under way. The former TJ Maxx space is an opportunity for a furniture store, fitness gym, or showroom.

New Hampshire's three largest retail developments namely the Market & Main on South River Rd. in Bedford, Woodmont Commons on Rte. 102 at Exit 4 in Londonderry, and Tuscan Village in Salem on Rte. 28 and Exit 1 at the 120-acre former Rockingham Park are continuing their fast-paced construction of rental apartments, condominiums and townhouses, and announcements of new signed retail leases.

Last week the cinema deal in Bedford received approval but the operator hasn't been announced yet. Part of their design/construction will include a multi-level parking garage, and multiple high-end restaurants including Pressed Café (the best granola bars ever!).

The Friendly Toast and Trader Joe's are scheduled to open soon, followed by Red Tavern, and REI.

Development in Merrimack continues at a rigorous pace including a 280-unit multifamily project at Exit 11, and Merrimack Park Place a 372,000 s/f mixed-use development at the entrance to the Premium Outlet Mall according to Michael Branton, VP of leasing for Keypoint Partners.

Construction of Merrimack-360, the redevelopment of the old Shaw's Plaza on DWH by OVP Management is complete with over 80% of the GLA leased. The new anchors are Altitude Trampoline Park and Planet Fitness. Specialty tenants include Dollar General, Myrilux Nails & Spa, Great Clips, Tuckers, Thirsty Moose and Hayward Ice Cream.

The last spaces available are the 10,000 s/f right endcap and a fully approved free standing pad at the light.

A few big box opportunities remain at the former Shaw's on South Willow St. and the former Building 19 in Manchester at Eastside Plaza and on Amherst St. in Nashua.

In spite of store closings, the most recent ones being Gymboree, Charlotte Rouse, and Payless Shoes we are gaining more than we are losing and hopefully will continue as the retail world evolves.

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