

Hamilton Township has offered to help Hamilton Mall

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HAMILTON TOWNSHIP — Phil Sartorio, the township’s director of community planning and economic development, swears he cannot see into the future.

But Sartorio did let Hamilton Mall management know last summer the township was willing to work with them to designate the mall as an area in need of redevelopment.

This was before the announcement that two of the mall’s three anchor stores would be closing. Sears closed in late October. [JCPenney will close July 5.](#)

Mall management did not respond to a request for comment.

Amid the closing of retail giants and smaller stores — Charlotte Russe and Payless ShoeSource also are closing — the mall has won several appeals of its tax assessment, reducing its value and consequently its contribution to the township’s ratable base.

The mall had a value of \$90,787,000 in 2017, but it was reduced to \$75 million last year, said William M. Johnson, the township tax assessor. The mall’s value was reduced again from \$75 million to \$50 million from last year to this year, Johnson said. That assessment does not include the anchor stores or the pads for Buffalo Wild Wings or LongHorn Steakhouse.

There is another active tax appeal for this year for the mall, Johnson said.

The impact of the mall’s tax appeals may become apparent this year when the 2019 budget is introduced during a Township Committee meeting at 6:30 p.m. Monday at the Municipal Building, Committeeman John Kurtz said Thursday.

A redevelopment area designation would give the Township Committee the power to offer tax-abatement incentives for projects done on the mall’s property that could increase its value.

“We can work with them as a redevelopment area, similar to what we have done with the racetrack,” Sartorio said, referring to the neighboring Atlantic City Race Course, which closed in 2015. The Township Committee voted last year to authorize the Planning Board to investigate whether the race course property qualified as an area in need of redevelopment.

The township has worked with mall management previously.

In 2012, the township’s planning, zoning and construction departments did what they could to get the mall through the process as quickly as possible for an expansion that made room for Buffalo Wild Wings, LongHorn Steakhouse and 63,000 square feet of retail, including Forever 21 and H&M.

But while the mall is losing stores, at least one new business is relocating to the mall, and an existing business is expanding.

Starcade is currently located on the ground floor of the Showboat Atlantic City, but the retro arcade will move in mid to late April to a 7,200-square-foot location next to Forever 21, said Bridget Den Boer, the Starcade manager.

And Ideal Institute of Technology, which has one small location inside the mall with a recording studio, will open a virtual reality lab next month, and a third larger location that will be an accredited classroom with financial aid should open in early to mid summer, Crystal Rodriguez, the mall's marketing manager, has said.