

No more retail uncertainty for High Street development

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March 12, 2009

WILLIAMSBURG - — Michael Coyle, the Williamsburg Five Guys Burger and Fries district manager, was able to scratch a few things off of his ever growing to-do list Monday — he spent the afternoon hanging signs on some the restaurant's bare walls and helping the general manager interview prospective employees, to get the store ready for its grand opening next week.

By this weekend, the list won't exist, Coyle said.

"We've got potatoes and peanuts coming tomorrow, and we'll be having our orientation on Friday," Coyle said Monday. "We'll definitely be ready when our doors open, and we're excited about it."

The national hamburger and hot dog fast food restaurant will open its Williamsburg location in High Street, a mixed-use residential and commercial planned community off of Richmond Road, on March 16 becoming the chain's first store on the Peninsula, and the development's first retail tenant to open.

In addition to Five Guys, High Street's largest retail tenant, the Movie Tavern, a restaurant and first-run movie theater, will open on March 27, said Dan Aston, a partner in [Roseland](#) Property Co., which is building the development.

"We're pleased with how things are shaping up in High Street," Aston said.

For almost a decade, residents have waited to see if and when High Street would come together.

Last summer, High Street began to take shape when construction started on portions of its residential area, which included its 191 apartment units and 16 town homes. The apartments and town houses were completed last fall while the 225,000-square-foot retail side was still under construction.

Aston said 60 percent of the High Street's retail section is complete, and he expects the section to be finished in a year. He didn't give a timetable on when the storefronts would be filled.

High Street is building during a time of economic distress, when major retailers are closing their doors and other shopping centers are finding it hard to fill vacant retail space.

There are about a dozen retailers lined up to move into High Street, Aston said. He said this includes Kilwin's, a candy store and ice cream shop, in addition to, a wine store, a nail salon, a bank and coffee shop.

There may also be interest in a restaurant moving into vacant retail space, said Kay Carl, marketing director for Roseland.

Local retailers have also been looking at High Street to relocate or open second stores, Aston said.

"We've had interest from people in the Williamsburg area and throughout [Hampton Roads](#)," he said.

Aston said, while he's aware of the economic conditions, he thinks High Street's retail side will do well.

"We're holding our own during these down times," Aston said. "We're leasing our apartments and interest is growing everyday in our town homes. I don't expect anything less from our retail side."

The town homes haven't sold since going on the market last fall.

Erin Hershkowitz, a spokeswoman with the International Council of Shopping Centers, said High Street will probably be able to fill its retail space.

"They probably won't be able to draw high-end retailers, but I think they'll be able to bring in smaller retail stores," Hershkowitz said. "They're already doing the right thing by bringing in movie and fast food tenants because they're actually seeing good business in the recession."

Aston said he plans to break ground on the next phase of town homes in about nine months. He also plans to begin building more than 300 condominiums in High Street over the next few years.