

Modell's looks to open in downtown Mount Kisco

By Evan Fallor
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Vacant for four years, the former Borders Books and Music location at 154-162 E. Main St. in Mount Kisco could soon have a new tenant.

Modell's Sporting Goods, the New York City-based chain with five locations in Westchester County, is expected to open a 16,800-square-foot store on the first and second floors of the 22,600-square-foot property, pending village planning board approval.

According to a sale deed, Stephen Lerner, founder of Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey-based commercial real estate firm Lerner Properties, owns 50 percent of the property with his cousin, Richard Grobman, operating under SL Mount Kisco LLC and Grobman Mt. Kisco LLC, respectively. Grobman is president of Dan's Supreme Supermarkets Inc., a metropolitan grocery chain headquartered on Long Island.

Modell's, operating under M&M Mt. Kisco LLC, owns the remaining 50 percent of the property.

Lerner Properties also owns Central Plaza at 2550 Central Ave. in Yonkers, which includes a Modell's store as well as a Barnes & Noble and Marshall's Shoe Shop.

The companies acquired the space in July from Miami Beach-based Kisco Retail LLC for \$6.3 million. Borders filed for bankruptcy and vacated the space in 2011, and the property reverted to a lender three years later after the building's Connecticut owner, an affiliate of Property Group Partners LLC in Wilton, defaulted on a \$6.3 million mortgage.

The planning board's review of Modell's application for a special use permit for the site has been adjourned until the board's next meeting Oct. 13.

Jonathan Gordon, president and CEO of Admiral Real Estate Services Corp. in Bronxville and one of the top retail brokers in Mount Kisco, said Modell's would be a welcome addition to the village's commercial district.

"Any life in that building is a net positive for Mount Kisco," Gordon said. "Retail real estate relies heavily on co-tenancy as a synergy between different retailers. If you lose retailers, you lose a critical mass of consumers and it eventually spirals down on itself."

Mount Kisco also features national retailers Gap, Ann Taylor and Banana Republic as well as a Bow Tie Cinema location and Target store. Still, according to statistics provided by Admiral Real Estate Services, Mount Kisco currently has an 8.4 percent commercial vacancy rate, a figure that has increased by more than 4 percent since 2010.

Although leasing activity in 2014 reduced the amount of available space on the market, leasing in the village this year has not kept pace with new vacancies, leaving the market with nearly 20,000 square feet of additional space this year.

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Conversely, Gordon said downtown Bronxville, for example, has flourished because of its ability to bring in larger retailers after a period of high vacancy rates. Mount Kisco also faces real and potential competition from its neighbors — a 40,000-square-foot Whole Foods supermarket was approved to open at Chappaqua Crossing in the town of New Castle and the nearly 3.5-acre Armonk Square has breathed new commercial life into that hamlet.

Because of its proximity to two major highways and a number of major state roads, Gordon said Mount Kisco is still the “retail oasis” for northern Westchester. He said he expects neighboring small businesses on East main Street would benefit from the arrival of a Modell’s, which would significantly increase foot traffic.

The site of the proposed Modell’s is only half a mile from Mount Kisco Sports, an independent retailer. The store’s co-owner, Robert Bernstein, at a public hearing spoke out against the retail chain’s entry into the village, noting the threat it posed to his business.

Gordon, though, said he doesn’t think the smaller store would be as financially damaged as might be expected. “People who shop at Mount Kisco Sports might not shop at Modell’s as well as the other way around,” he said.

Bernstein could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

A time frame for a Modell’s opening if approved by the planning board was not immediately available.

Modell’s also has locations in Greenburgh, Mohegan Lake, Port Chester and New Rochelle.