

Big Y clears key hurdle

- The store could create more than 100 jobs.

By Dick Lindsay

Berkshire Eagle Staff

LEE — Big Y Foods Inc. is getting closer to building a new supermarket in Lee, and in the process could produce more than 100 jobs.

The town's Planning Board has unanimously approved plans for the Springfield-based supermarket chain to construct a 48,000-square-foot store at the former Diesel Dan's truck stop on Pleasant Street (Route 102). The 8-acre parcel, currently owned by F.L. Roberts & Co. of Springfield, is located off Exit 2 of the Massachusetts Turnpike. Big Y officials said an additional 5,000 square feet will be added to accommodate either one or two yet-to-be-named retailers. "That's conceivable," said Big Y's local attorney, Don Hunter. "The 5,000 square feet is big enough for two stores." Pending further local and state approvals, Big Y officials expect construction to begin this fall and the new store opening next summer, employing between 120 and 150 full- and part-time workers.

The Lee Zoning Board of Appeals, the Conservation Commission and state environmental officials also must approve the project as it will be built near the flood plain of the Housatonic River. Big Y will seek approval from the ZBA during a hearing on Sept. 1, 7 p.m. at Town Hall. The Lee Conservation Commission and state environmental officials has already begun its scrutiny of the proposal, but have yet to give their final approval.

Even the Planning Board has one more issue to resolve, before it completely signs-off on the project. Town planners will resume debate over — and vote on — signage for the new Big Y store at it's meeting on Sept. 27.

While the five-member board on Monday night unanimously agreed to allow a free-standing internally lit sign at the main entrance to the supermarket, it remained divided on whether the trademark "Big Y" sign on the front of the building should also be illuminated from within.

Board Chairman David Durante fears too many internally illuminated signs will ruin the town's character.

"I don't see a need for such a sign [on the store] as critical, since local shoppers will know where this place

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Big Y closer

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is," said chairman of the board, David Durante.

However, Harold Sherman finds the look of internally lit signs no worse than externally illuminated ones.

" I don't see any difference between 'Big Y' [internally lit] and 'Big Y' with a spotlight," Sherman said.

If the \$15 million project is given the green light, Big Y will give Price Chopper — the town's only other supermarket —

competition for the first time since the former Adams Supermarkets chain closed 20 years ago.

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