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Claire Louder: Finally, a development district for Odenton By Claire Louder, Correspondent

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After years of advocacy by the West County chamber on behalf of the need for Anne Arundel County to invest in infrastructure in the Odenton Town Center, Monday night's County Council meeting brought a ray of hope.

At the request of the administration, Council President John Grasso introduced a resolution creating a tax increment development district through which Odenton Town Center infrastructure can be funded using the additional property revenues generated by new development within the district.

In our tax-capped county, the advantages of such an approach are several. First, no current general revenue funds will be required to fund these capital projects. Second, no new taxes are required – property owners will continue to pay the same amount they would otherwise owe the county, with the only difference being that a portion of that tax will be allocated to the Odenton Town Center Development District.

Finally, because the county can bond against the projected future tax revenues that will accrue as a result of the new development occurring and planned in Odenton, needed public projects can go forward now, spurring even more development (and additional tax revenues).

Among the projects which have been suggested for financing through the new development district are improvements to Telegraph Road and Route 175, removal and replacement of the eyesore BGE towers from Telegraph Road, realignment and resignalization of the grid streets on the north side of Route 175, and, of course, construction of parking garages at the **MARC**train station.

While this bill certainly seems a step in the right direction, the devil will as always be in the details. As robust as development is expected to be, the projected tax increment will certainly not be enough to cover the entire "wish list" of public projects identified for the Odenton Town Center – choices will have to be made.

Frequently decisions about Odenton are made by county officials who rarely, if ever, have set foot here. Shouldn't the people who are creating change in Odenton – and supplying the added tax revenues that will fund the necessary infrastructure – have a say in prioritizing the public projects to be constructed?

Then there's the issue of double-dipping. Already developers are required to pay impact fees to offset their effect on schools, roads, and public safety facilities. These funds are required by law to be used by the county to increase capacity in these facilities, rather than requiring taxpayers to absorb the cost.

Yet frequently in addition to paying impact fees, developers are also required to make the improvements to those facilities that the impact fees should have funded, such as road widening and school additions.

The last time we requested the total of transportation impact fees collected in the Odenton Town Center in 2012 it was \$10 million, of which none had been reinvested in the town center. That number would be significantly higher today, as a number of projects have submitted development fees since that time.

By contrast, all transportation impact fees in the Arundel Mills area are required to be spent in that development district, thereby directly benefitting the businesses in that area.

If the county is going to take the step of allocating the tax increment from the Odenton Town Center to construction of infrastructure here, shouldn't they also ensure that the impact fees from Odenton support Odenton's transportation needs?

The creation of the Odenton Town Center Development District could be the best move yet toward realizing the vision of the Odenton Town Center. We need to make sure it meets the long term needs of the community, as we're unlikely to get a second chance.

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