

## County Strikes Deal with Developer to Widen Route 175

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Severn Patch by Brian Funk | April 15, 2011

Lacking state transportation funds, the County worked a deal with a local developer to widen the road in preparation of BRAC.

Maryland Route 175 West of Rockenbach Road to Clarke Road will be widened to five lanes thanks to a deal with the State Highway Administration and land developer Joe Rutter of BRS/EGGERL.

Rutter will act not as a developer, but as an agent of the State to oversee the widening project as the region prepares for the influx of traffic from Fort Meade's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC).

State money was not available to Anne Arundel County to widen the road thanks to a lack of funds in the transportation trust fund according to West Anne Arundel County Chamber of Commerce CEO and Founder Claire Louder.

"There is no trust in the trust fund," says Louder, who is a member of START (Statewide Transportation Alliance to Restore the Trust). "The Governor keeps taking money out of the transportation trust fund and moving it to other parts of the budget. So then there's no money in the transportation budget to pay for things like the much needed widening of Maryland Route 175."

Rutter and his company are involved in a project called Parkside that will transform Blobs Park and the surrounding scrub brush and woods into a 240-acre mixed-use complex, housing 1,144 townhomes, a 300,000 square foot office complex, a church/school as well as a pool, club house and tennis courts.

"It is not a BRAC project, but it will address some of the housing needs for BRAC," said Rutter, who has been asked to put this project on hold in order to begin the widening of Route 175.

"We were disputing with the state some access points [to the Parkside project]," said Rutter. "But rather than get into a big argument about everything, we entered into a memorandum of understanding in the spring of 2010 and at that point we all agreed that Parkside would have traffic mitigation and with that impact fees."

Rutter's Parkside project would have required what the State of Maryland calls adequate public facility changes to an existing road that would increase transportation flow. When this occurs, the developer is charged an impact fee.

Since construction was needed on several intersections along Route 175 to access the Parkside complex, instead of making those changes twice, the county eliminated Rutter's fees and lifted permits in order to begin widening a one mile stretch of the road instead of just a few intersections.

"There certainly is a cost to them that they wouldn't be bearing at this point, way in advance of any income coming in from (Parkside)," said Louder. "So by asking them to widen that section of road with private funds, by their agreeing to accelerate it, it helped solve the county's problem and they are doing something that needed to be done anyway."

Louder, who heads the BRAC Regional Transportation Committee, saw a major bottleneck for the people coming in from Northern Virginia from 295 to the Rockenbach gate at Fort Meade. "That was the best gate for entrance, and that was our first priority for widening."

"It was a good partnership between the State Highway Administration, us and the County," said Rutter. "Everyone knows BRAC is on its way, we all know what the State's financial situation is as well as the Federal financial situation, and nothing was really moving forward with some of the road improvements."

The widening project began in February of 2011 and is slated to be completed by November 30, 2011 with five-lanes open to traffic, which means the base painting would be there and you can drive on all-five lanes.

Louder's hope is to push traffic to the Rockenbach gate for those traveling to Fort Meade as opposed to traveling down Route 175 to enter the fort at other gates causing major delays.

"[It would] obviously would impact all of us who live and work in Severn and Odenton," said Louder. "If we can get the road widened the rest of the way it will make traffic smoother for the entire community."

Another development group will be in charge of widening from Rockenbach Road to Disney Road, which will be about a year behind the completion of the current widening project. Rutter

has been asked to coordinate the Rockenbach intersection widening project with the second development group to make sure everything goes smoothly.

"Everything that can go wrong goes wrong when you start construction," said Rutter. Most of the road was built 50-60 years ago, and the original road dates back to World War I.

"There are things that you find that nobody has records of. You're digging along and 'oh gee, here's a gas line'. 'Is it abandoned or is it a real line?' Nobody has any plans for this stuff. So you find things and you have to go searching for where things go and end up."

Rutter said his contractor, American Infrastructure, has been doing an excellent job of making sure that work has been done during off-peak driving time.

Currently work has halted so BGE can relocate gas lines that are under the road. "So you have to close the lane to do the work," said Rutter. "Of course they try to avoid the peak hours too."

BRAC is shifting approximately 22,000 employees to Fort Meade by September, 2011, creating a need for new offices, homes, shops, restaurants and an infrastructure that can handle the added demand of increased traffic.

"We always knew this project wouldn't be done by the time the people get here (from BRAC)," said Louder. "Most of the people will be here by mid-summer. We are really glad that they (Rutter) stepped up and met the needs of the county, because we didn't think this would get done at all. It's a fantastic deal for the county that they were willing to make the sacrifice to do it early."