

The Odenton Town Center – What's Up?

Site Search GO

by James Houck, [What's Up? Magazine](#)
February 15, 2012

 [The Odenton Town Center](#)

How this West County pocket has experienced a major development boom.

Three years ago, the editors of What's Up? Media hit the road and enjoyed a day-long driving tour of the Odenton Town Center region affectionately referred to as "the Turtle," a large swath of property of which the commercial boundaries bear a reptilian resemblance (from a bird's eye view).

The Turtle had big plans in 2009, as many developers (commercial and residential) were clamoring for permit rights to transform the many parcels within Odenton from an Anne Arundel County outskirt into a thriving county hub. All of this in anticipation of the U.S. Army's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), which continually feeds new jobs (mostly to the Fort Meade military complex), new residents, and new needs to the area.

What we saw in 2009 were big plans seemingly at a standstill. The planned developments along The Turtle's two main traffic arteries (routes 175 and 170) were either in the planning process or in permit purgatory, at the mercy of the county's need to examine in due diligence each project. A large, mixed-use retail/residential/office development—similar to that in Annapolis at Parole—was nothing more than a grass field. Premium apartment complexes had yet to break ground. The MARC commuter train station remained a lone outpost, among scattered businesses and an aging shopping center. Put simply, not much was visibly happening in 2009, save for many "Coming Soon" signs.

Fortunately, for Odenton's smart growth advocates, such as West County Chamber of Commerce President Claire Louder, time allows for positive change. In the three years since that media-member driving tour, the Turtle has seen several projects go sky-high and the building of others nearing their start. At the southerly entrance to Odenton Town Center proper, the Odenton Gateway project is under construction (quite visibly) and will expand the footprint of medical services already provided at the adjacent Winmark Center—a joint venture between Anne Arundel Health System and Johns Hopkins Medicine. Odenton Gateway will also be home to the 250- plus apartment complex, Haven at Odenton Gateway, scheduled for completion this coming April.

Farther northwest, along Route 175, the vacant field overlooking the once-lonely MARC station now features the four-story concrete and steel skeleton of what will become the Village at Odenton Station— 400,000 square feet of boutique shops, new apartments, a piazza, clock tower, and hiker/biker trail all within an old-fashioned, pedestrian-friendly, village architectural style. The project is dubbed the "county's first transit-oriented development," being within footsteps of the rail line. And just across Route 175, the Town Centre Commons are nearly finished, featuring 144 condo/apartment units stretching eight stories high.

Similar projects are planned along Route 170, which cuts perpendicular to 175. The demolition of the first of the old Nevamar commercial buildings will soon give way to construction of a 369-apartment complex through an agreement with the property owners, StonebridgeCarras. This is the first phase of what will be a multi-phase development, including additional residential, substantial retail, and some office space.

"Things are booming in West County," says Louder enthusiastically. "Though a few projects are still on hold, pending construction of a new sewer line [which Anne Arundel County has been expediting and hopes to have in place by early 2014], many more are moving forward. Bob Hannon [president of the county's Economic Development Corporation] and Larry Tom [county Planning and zoning officer] have been tremendously helpful in raising the profile of the Odenton Town Center and, in Larry's case, encouraging Planning and Zoning to work with developers to 'get to yes' in ways that are consistent with the intent of the Master Plan rather than looking for reasons to say no."

The needed transformation of Odenton is largely attributed to the influx of public and private sector expansion resulting from BRAC—much of the growth being on base at Fort Meade, but also peripheral additions such as the creation of the new U.S. Cyber Command and its associated agencies, the 5.8 million-square-foot expansion of the National Security Agency, and National Business Park's continued development.

That's a lot of space to fill with military and highly-trained personnel. BRAC, thus far, is responsible for 5,695 military relocations to Fort Meade, but the overall employed population there has skyrocketed from an estimated 34,000 in 2007 to 56,800 today. Add to the mix 98 partner organizations (tenants) on Fort Meade property—a jump from 73 in 2007—and it becomes clear as crosshairs why Odenton has experienced its growth spurt in the surrounding civilian community.

Louder adds, "In terms of support contractors, Anne Arundel County's BRAC Task Force office [headed by Bob Leib] found that 4,393 off-base civilian contractors had relocated to Anne Arundel County as of October 2011. We don't have projections for surrounding counties, [but] our original projection was for 10,000 contractors to all counties by 2015."

Like Odenton, towns and communities that call Fort Meade neighbor, such as Crofton, Hanover, and Laurel, have each experienced their own micro-boom of recent development, all of which will hopefully inject a much-needed economic booster shot into an otherwise bear market. (More on these towns in future issues of *What's Up? West County*.) County officials and action agents, like Louder, are hoping to make Odenton a successful example of how a community adapts to change and prepares for a future of unlimited potential and opportunity.

"In two to three years, enough elements of the Odenton Town Center will be in place for outsiders to finally see the tremendous economic potential of the area that those of us who are involved here already understand," says Louder. "Retailers will begin to seek us out as a hub of commercial activity, and residents will no longer have to drive to surrounding communities to find services. Personnel stationed at Ft. Meade will have more reasons to connect to the community, and want to leave the Post to experience the restaurants and shops nearby."

To learn more about the Odenton Town Center, BRAC, and Anne Arundel County development, visit Whatsupmag.com and click the "Community" tab at the top of the site.