

West County Business: Fort Meade impact felt countywide

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Capital Gazette Communications

Published 01/22/12

BRAC is officially over, with all agencies constructed and all employees at their desks, but growth at Fort Meade continues and will for years to come.

Employment projections through 2015 have already been reached, and as more concrete numbers are released for Cyber Command, it is clear it will bring at least as many employees as BRAC did. Yet many in Anne Arundel County still struggle to understand the impact of Fort Meade's expansion on our area, and the waves of growth past and future.

Throughout preparations for the influx of personnel at Fort Meade, those involved in the process have referred to all of the growth by the shorthand "BRAC." BRAC actually refers to "Base Realignment and Closure Commission," in this case the 2005 commission that decided to relocate numerous agencies from other states to Maryland military facilities.

In Anne Arundel, this included the Defense Information Systems Agency, Defense Media Activities, and Defense Adjudications Co-Location. These three agencies make up 5,700 of the 22,000 employees initially projected as part of the "BRAC" growth, but in fact are the only ones truly associated with BRAC.

Since 2007, additional growth has come from the National Security Agency (an estimated 6,680 positions), growth of other agencies at Fort Meade (an estimated 2,000 employees), and the addition of the US Cyber Command, not anticipated in 2007.

Ten thousand defense contractors were also expected to relocate to the area as part of the Enhanced Use Lease development, a means for the Army to contract with a private developer to construct offices on federal land across from the installation.

That contract is still not signed, but the defense contractors came anyway, finding space in local office parks instead. An estimated 5,000 are now in place in Anne Arundel County alone.

The economic impact on Anne Arundel County is significant. In 2007, Fort Meade and its 34,000 employees contributed more than \$10 billion to the local, state, and regional economy. In 2012, with that figure grown to \$17 billion, and more than 56,000 employees, Fort Meade is the largest employer in Maryland and the fourth largest military installation in the country.

This growth can't be accounted for only by BRAC projections – in fact, while there were 73 Partner Commands (separate agencies) located at Fort Meade in 2007, there are now close to 100, and only three of those additions are BRAC-related.

But we're not done yet. The US Cyber Command, established in October 2009, and its related agencies have only begun to grow. With over 2,800 employees projected by the end of fiscal year 2016, many scheduled to be in place by the end of this year, Fort Meade's Cyber Command will begin construction this fall on more than 1 million square feet of facilities, including a data center and two operations centers, on Fort Meade's current golf course.

It will adjoin NSA's expansion facility, currently submitted as 5.8 million square feet but rumored to be larger and expected to house 6500 employees (some already working in the local area).

With these employees, already here and planned, come traffic, housing needs, educational requirements and demand for services. Though Anne Arundel County and the Fort Meade Regional Growth Management Committee have tried to be proactive, the expansion comes at a time when government funds have evaporated.

While local officials estimate \$4 billion is needed for transportation improvements around Fort Meade, only \$60 million has been received – enough to upgrade two off-post intersections and improve one access gate and related intersection on-post.

Anne Arundel County Public Schools have been more successful, restructuring their programs to promote STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and math) valued by the growing agencies. Anne Arundel Community College has also expanded its STEM resources. This includes the new Cyber Center opening at Arundel Mills, degrees in Cybersecurity and Information Assurance, and matriculation agreements with four-year colleges, some allowing degree completion in Anne Arundel County.

But as Fort Meade grows, more will need to be done, requiring the attention, and investment, of the entire county to reap the promised benefits of "BRAC" expansion: jobs, development and

tax revenues for our local economy.

Are we going to make those investments? Or are we going to let those benefits go elsewhere?
The first step is understanding that what happens at Fort Meade impacts all of us in Anne Arundel County.

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