

Editor's note: Bus trip reveals a lot is happening in and around Fort Meade



Dan Beyers/For Capital Business - A bus took business leaders on a tour of Howard County.

By [Dan Beyers](#), Published: November 24, 2013

For most of my life, I have lived in Columbia, a Howard County community about halfway between Washington and Baltimore. And that means for most of my adult life, I've endured long commutes to and from work.

Last week, the tables turned. Washington came to me, or more precisely, the Greater Washington Board of Trade delivered about 80 businesspeople to Clyde's restaurant on downtown Columbia's Lake Kittamaqundi lakefront for a bus tour of the U.S. Cyber Command at nearby Fort Meade and its surroundings.

Even when you live in a place, you can learn a thing or two on these trips.

Now boarding

Our host, James C. Dinegar, the Board of Trade's president and chief executive, set the table for our excursion, saying that for all the talk about the expansion of Fort Meade, and its chief inhabitant, the National Security Agency, the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the base are still largely underdeveloped. But that is changing quickly. Downtown Columbia, where we found our buses, is preparing for a new wave of construction. The county has approved plans for more apartments and retail. Developers are contemplating a campus where universities can co-locate, like Montgomery has done at Shady Grove. Next door to Clyde's, a Whole Foods is taking over the former Rouse Co. headquarters, a building designed by Frank Gentry. John E. DeWolf III, who heads up development for the project and so much more downtown, said there's still room upstairs.

“We actually need a tenant for the top floor, so if you are interested come see me!” joked the senior vice president of Texas-based Howard Hughes Corp.

En route to Odenton

Fort Meade and the NSA headquarters are located in Anne Arundel, on its western border with Howard County. All around the complex, new development is popping up. One of the more ambitious is a place called Arundel Preserve, which aspires to be one of those live-work-play town centers so much in vogue now. There’s already a 150-room hotel that’s running at 90 percent occupancy and a steak place “where you need a reservation,” said William S. Barroll, senior vice president for Corporate Office Properties Trust, which is a partner on the project. The cyber contractor KEYW moved its headquarters to the development, which sits not only near Fort Meade, but is about a mile from Anne Arundel Mills mall and the Maryland Live casino there.

Cars, cars

Next stop is Odenton, a community near Fort Meade, where development is just beginning to stir. The parking lot at the MARC train station is full; it’s the busiest station between Baltimore and Washington. The county is contemplating building a parking garage and bringing an end to the free parking.

Just peachy

Barroll tells us Corporate Office Properties Trust got lucky. A spinoff from utility giant BGE, it happened to own a peach orchard across the Baltimore-Washington Parkway from the NSA. Now that land is home to all the big names in government contracting: Computer Sciences Corp., Booz Allen Hamilton, Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics and more. “We like tenants that are sticky,” Barroll quipped.

On the base

Big things are coming to Fort Meade. There are 16 construction projects underway on the post. That giant NSA data center that drew so much attention in Utah? There’s a 60 megawatt monster to rival it underway at Fort Meade, so big it required a special agreement for water from Howard County to keep the coming equipment cool. A new base exchange is being erected with its own Apple Store. Fort Meade will have garden apartments for enlisted service members, unheard of in the military. These days, 54,108 people work on the post, and more are coming.

“This is our nation’s cyber center of gravity,” Fort Meade Garrison Commander Col. Brian P. Foley told us.

Judging by all the activity around the base, it could be a center of gravity for much more.