



On Odenton

WINER



Aligning the Planets for Odenton



It is now clear to most everyone that Odenton Town Center will not be what the County originally envisioned for West County. Not that it cannot or will not result in a successful economic return for the County at some point with modified commercial impact and services for the community. But will it ever enjoy the density and sense of “place” the County and community hoped for? There are many reasons, some understandable and some maddening why so many visit even the many new housing and medical office additions to the area and still wonder aloud “ so where is this Town Center?” I realize I’ve written about this before and it has taken many forms, almost as many as the plans the County has had for Odenton that have yet to be realized.

For goodness sake, we’re immediately adjacent to one of the largest federal office expansions in history at Fort Meade. In our little Odenton solar system of development, there are many new local Odenton projects in just the last few years that have added 1,000 residential units, and new medical office projects. In the next year, work is expected to begin on Town Center Boulevard (I suggest renaming it), opening up a previously undeveloped large tract. But, there is still no “sun” around which these “planets” can orbit, no heat to warm them or draw them in. In other words all these developments are on their own, left to wander great distances and away from their own community to find the energy (services & activities) necessary to sustain them.

The center of town for Odenton is to be created by urban scale density that can only be built if there is structured parking and certain County street and intersection improvements at or near the MARC train station. It’s known as the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area and has been part of the plan for many years. After many false starts, accentuated by foot dragging at the State, only now is the County seriously looking at how to get that process funded and

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IS ODENTON TRULY A TOWN CENTER?



Stuart Title

I have recently asked the question is the “Odenton Town Center” really a true Town Center by definition. According to Wikipedia:

The town center is the term used to refer to the commercial or geographical center or core area of a town. Town centers are traditionally associated with shopping or retail. They are also the center of communications with major public transport hubs such as train or bus stations. Public buildings including town halls, museums and libraries are often found in town centers. Town centers are symbolic to settlements as a whole and often contain the best examples of architecture, main landmark buildings, statues and public spaces associated with a place.

Columbia Maryland comes to mind as the first modern day Town Center started back in the 1960’s. In Columbia, the “center” focused around a lake, public area, performance venue, library and a retail mall. The Rouse Building was its landmark building and the architectural centerpiece along with a sculpture by the lake.

Unfortunately the term “Town Center” has become generic, so much so that the first thought when asked what does “Town Center” mean the majority answer is shopping. The location nor the amenities of the definition of a “Town Center” no longer seem to matter, only the perception does.

This brings me back to the “Odenton Town Center”. It is situated at the “core” of Odenton; it has a “major transportation hub” (MARC, CMRT); we have the library and the Odenton Heritage Society Muse-

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DO YOU KNOW?

1130 Annapolis Road in the Odenton Health & Technology Campus (formerly Winmark Center) is celebrating 25 years. It was the first and only Class A office space in Odenton for many years. We are happily reconstructing spaces to welcome new tenants.

Also, a little trivia history: The Old Bethel Church located at Becknel & Waco served as the first public library in Odenton. It is now owned by the Odenton Heritage Society and this tidbit came from their Heritage Times newsletter. Odentonheritage.org

underway. If they build it, they (the developers, stores, users and residents) will come.

Most recently, the community, developers and local business associations have worked together to give the County a plan, a method and a timetable to help Odenton to become Odenton. They have submitted to the County yet again, as they have done every year, a list of priorities the County could follow. Not all that is needed is up to the County. The State has planned for improvements for many years as well and has yet to fund them. Even here, the County can lead by keeping the State's "feet to the fire". It would be different if the community were apathetic. To the contrary, the community still waits for its "center" and will support County efforts.

But in the end, the County can adopt the community's priority list, get the projects necessary listed in its own capital plans, get all its departments on board and begin to seriously approach implementation without nearly as much lip service as in the past. Even the seemingly small things are important. Odenton is home to the West County Regional Library, the largest in the County. Yet no one can find it hidden behind overgrowth and foliage on Annapolis Road. Clear it, so on a clear day or night, you can begin to see our stars.



Local community sign & photo (below) from 2006.



The same corner as seen today in 2013.

Both photos are of The West County Regional Library location as it appears from the intersection at Routes 170 and 175... Invisible!



Truly A Town Center?—continued from page 1, column 2

um (Odenton Road); a new "landmark" building (Village at Odenton Station); and public spaces. Unfortunately the only ingredient missing (for the most part) is "shopping/retail" which by a majority of those asked, is the "current day" definition of a "true" "Town Center". I'll let you all be the judge!

We chatted about What Makes A Town Center in the office and there were plenty of thoughts to go around! Join the debate, and weigh in with your opinion by visiting the blog on the homepage of our website at www.ajprop.net.

THE A. J. ADVISOR

We missed you this summer. Hope you missed us too. We were hard at work serving on the Anne Arundel County Executive's Commission on Excellence! It was a cyclopean endeavor. We had the opportunity to work with really great people and we learned a lot about County processes and working conditions. Our team has the hopeful expectation of many recommendations being instituted for the greater good. We're happy to be back and hope you enjoy reading this issue of the A. J. Advisor!

Our paper newsletter is fading away. Sign up for our e-version at www.ajprop.net under the News tab or call us with your email address.