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County redevelopment plans align with state report

By Paul Lagasse plagasse@somdnews.com 9 hrs ago

A new report on community revitalization strategies released by state planning authorities will benefit redevelopment efforts in Charles County, according to the county's economic development team.

The report, "Reinvest Maryland 2.0," was released by the Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission and the state's department of planning. It is an updated version of a report that was first published four years ago.

Taylor Yewell, redevelopment manager in the county's economic development department, said that much of the guidance in the document is consistent with the economic development department's five-year plan, which lays out strategies for attracting businesses involved in federal contracting, health services, retail and hi-tech industries to Charles County.

In particular, two community redevelopment projects that the county is working on right now, align well with the strategic plan's goal of improving gateways into the county, Yewell explained.

The projects are Waldorf Station at the intersection of Mattawoman Beantown Road and U.S. 301, and the Washington Urban Redevelopment Corridor along Old Washington Road.

Greenberg Gibbons is in the process of preparing a development plan for the Waldorf Station property, which will include mixed-use residential and retail buildings and walkable spaces similar to Annapolis Towne Centre, which Greenberg Gibbons also developed.

Late in this year's General Assembly, the state legislature earmarked \$13 million for an interchange on U.S. 301 at the future terminus of the new Western Parkway extension and the existing terminus of Mattawoman Beantown Road, which promises to offer relief to commuters along that heavily congested stretch of Crain Highway.

In addition to the state money, the county has dedicated \$2.7 million in its 2019 fiscal year budget for the construction of the Western Parkway's final leg from Pierce Road to Mattawoman Beantown Road.

The site where Western Parkway will join U.S. 301 had at one time been proposed as the location for a Walmart super-center until Walmart decided to withdraw from the project in July 2016.

"Waldorf Station is a textbook case of redevelopment," Yewell said. "It will be an excellent case study in smart growth."

"We see [Waldorf Station] as probably the project that will come along earliest," Yewell explained. "WURC will benefit from that experience because it will set a pretty high bar for future projects."

The WURC redevelopment project, located along Old Washington Road between Smallwood Drive and Leonardtown Road, has been paused while the county public works department addresses stormwater management and right-of-way issues that emerged during the planning phases.

Earlier this month, the federal government granted "opportunity zone" designations to both Waldorf Station and the WURC project.

The opportunity zone program allows investors to defer paying federal taxes on the capital gains they make from selling assets such as stocks, bonds and real estate for up to 10 years, provided that they deposit the money into a specially designated opportunity fund.

The money in the opportunity fund is then used to invest in small businesses and development projects in the opportunity zone areas.

Yewell said that the two Charles County redevelopment projects differ in one crucial respect from other case studies of successful community revitalization efforts across the state that are included in the “Reinvest Maryland 2.0” report.



Case studies in the report include the revitalization of Victorian-era buildings and streets in the town of Berlin in Worcester County, a neighborhood initiative in the Dundalk community of Baltimore and the renovation of downtown Hagerstown.

“When you look at the case studies, they’re older and more mature than those in Charles County,” Yewell said. “We’re only just approaching redevelopment. It represents a new chapter in the county.”

Yewell said that the buildings in the areas included in the Waldorf Station and WURC redevelopment projects date mostly from the 1960s and 1970s and were not constructed as part of an overall development plan.

“The plan is to rethink those to make them more coherent,” Yewell explained. “Charles County is benefitting now from the experience of a lot of other jurisdictions.”

“The goal is for us to put a successful case study into a future Reinvest Maryland report,” Yewell said.

In addition to case studies, the “Reinvest Maryland 2.0” report includes best practices for encouraging investment in economically deprived communities and resources for development officers.

“It’s a good and useful document,” Yewell said. “I hope future administrations keep it going.”

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