

# MARYLAND

LAURA VOZZELLA / HARTFORD CAMPAIGN SHOWS THE 'PRINCE OF DARKNESS' OFF HIS GAME PG 28

## Homes proposed near Fort Meade

Developer pitches plans for town center and 1,600 homes on industrial Laurel tract

BY PHILLIP MCGOWAN  
(SUN REPORTER)

An Annapolis developer has proposed building at least 1,600 homes on a major undeveloped tract near fast-growing Fort Meade, but some county officials and neighborhood residents worry about the project's impact on crowded roads and schools.

Developer John C. Stamato envisions a high-density enclave of urban-style living — homes, shops, restaurants and offices — on about 300 acres next to the Patuxent Research Refuge and within a mile of the booming Army post, according to two community leaders in Laurel who have been briefed on the plans.

Stamato's development company, Ribera Development, wants the Anne Arundel County Council to create residential and commercial districts on the industrially zoned land, said Councilman

Bill D. Burlison, an Odenton Democrat who expects to introduce the measure.

The legislation would set aside 10 percent of the residences for "work force" housing and market those units to Anne Arundel County employees, according to three council members who have been briefed on the proposal. The measure might be introduced Sept. 5.

Stamato declined to discuss the project in detail, but he said he was eager to tap into the demand for housing generated by the base realignment and closure process, or BRAC, that is to bring thousands of workers to the post. The National Security Agency, also at Fort Meade, is also expanding.

"What we are anxious to do is sit down with residents and do a good project that meets the needs [of] BRAC and provide a town center," said Stamato, who plans to begin work next year on a (Please see GATEWAY, 7B)

FRIDAY 08.18.2006 7B

## FROM THE COVER

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**GATEWAY** (From Page 1B)

2,000-home development called Two Rivers in Odenton. "If we get going now, we can hopefully develop homes by the time BRAC starts. We don't want to wait."

But County Executive Janet S. Owens, a Democrat who steps down this year, said she has serious misgivings about eliminating such a large tract of industrially zoned land, some of the last of its kind in western Anne Arundel. With the fall elections near, she said, the next county executive and council would be better positioned to consider such legislation. She said, however, that she has not taken a position on the proposal.

"I would recommend not introducing any project or any massive change in zoning at this time," Owens said. "You have to know where you are going to get water and sewer."

The major housing proposal, which has not been formally announced, comes as the county braces for the shift of at least 20,000 defense jobs to Fort Meade. The boom is expected to spur significant private development.

"We are living in the wild, wild West County," said Tim Reyburn, president of the Russett Community Association.

The land in question is a largely contiguous strip along the south side of Route 198, across the two-lane highway from the District of Columbia Children's Center, which includes the troubled Oak Hill youth detention center. Community leaders from Maryland City and Russett said this week that they hoped Stamato's plan could add to mounting regional pressure to relocate the troubled



detention facility.

"I can't envision them building a town center with nice condos and all of that, and [the detention center] being left there," said Ray Smallwood, president of the Maryland City Civic Association. Smallwood and Reyburn said they were recently briefed on the project.

Stamato has spent several months pitching his concept to community leaders, other developers, County Council members and Owens' administration. He said the tract is full of undulating slopes that make the building of anything but a residential-commercial development impractical.

"There's a reason why the property is still sitting there," he said.

But the prospect of such a huge project also has community leaders concerned about the effects on roads, schools and water services.

One county elementary school, Brock Bridge, is over capacity, and the other, Maryland City, would

almost immediately reach capacity if the new development were approved. Owens set aside \$4.5 million in her current-year budget for a study of widening Route 198 near Fort Meade. Also, Maryland City and Russett are among several communities under mandatory water restrictions until October.

On the other hand, civic leaders said Stamato's development could draw attention to the need for a new elementary school and put the upgrading of Route 198, along with water and sewer capacity, on a fast track. They said high-end dining and shopping options are sorely lacking.

They said they believe that if the council gives the Stamato the go-ahead to the project, momentum will build to redevelop Oak Hill.

Debate over the future of Oak Hill has been renewed in recent months because of security concerns by Fort Meade and its lead tenant, the NSA. A state highway separates Oak Hill from the NSA by a few hundred yards. Legislation is pending in Congress to relocate the juvenile facility District officials want to replace the current facility with a modern one.

Local and federal leaders have proposed turning sections of the 900-acre Oak Hill property into a buffer area for NSA, which is situated just a few hundred yards from the youth detention center, a regional park and a commercial district for defense contractors.

"It's going to increase the calls for closing Oak Hill," Reyburn said. The property also backs up to the 7,600-acre Patuxent Research Refuge and would abut the federally controlled Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

Stamato has been in discussions

with the National Park Service for several months to bring water and sewer lines across the parkway to the project site, according to a spokesman for that National Park Service.

Federal officials have balked because they have not gained assurances that Stamato will preserve a fostered buffer that runs along the parkway, said agency spokesman Bill Line. Federal officials have been known to take a hard line on encroaching development along the parkway.

"He needs to be more clear about how this development would not damage the buffer zone," Line said. Smallwood said he was told by a Ribera representative that Stamato may seek to hook into Piney Orchard's water system.

Since initially meeting with county officials six months ago, Stamato said, he has conducted engineering studies and spoken with commercial developers, who concluded that the land is best suited for homes and a town center. He said he's awaiting to present his full findings with Owens.

Stamato is being assisted by Bob DiPietro, Owens' former chief of staff who is serving as the spokesman for her state comptroller campaign.

Odenton residents praised the developer for getting their feedback for Two Rivers. Smallwood and Reyburn said that Stamato has asked them, along with Fort Meade officials, to join an advisory group that would oversee the look of the project. Stamato is also proposing a community center on the site.

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