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Prince George's Inc.: Mixed-Use Pulls into Hyattsville

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Tim Taylor of Prince George's Metro Center Inc. stands at University Town Center, which will include office, residential and retail space. Photo by Aretha White

Among the scores of construction teams and machinery within walking distance to the Hyattsville Metro station, a 56-acre mixed-use development is coming to life in Prince George's County. University Town Center, one of the county's first mixed-use projects, is transforming into a hub for Hyattsville — complete with residential, retail and office space.

"The concept the county wanted to see is urban development to encourage people to use the Metro," said Tim Taylor, vice president of leasing for Prince George's Metro Center Inc., which is developing the site. "The metro is the key to development in this area; it's done wonders."

Taylor said the project's three phases, valued at \$1.2 billion, will create a place to live, work and play.

"People are excited about the lifestyle," he said. "It's a perfect example of revitalization and smart growth."

The project is Herschel W. Blumberg's dream.

Blumberg, 82, president and owner of Prince George's Metro Center Inc., said the project has been 50 years in the making. He bought the land in 1954, but waited until the time was right to develop University Town Center. The county, he said, was not economically sound years ago.

"Over time, I found that part of the property lent itself to something beyond houses, and I consulted with some very knowledgeable people," he said. "I found a town center was the thing to do."

The site includes four office buildings totaling 1.4 million square feet — three built in the 1960s and 1970s, and one built in 2003.

Office tenants currently occupying the space include the National Center for Health Statistics, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Kaiser Permanente, the U.S. Department of Labor and Prince George's Community College.

The first phase of the project includes a 242,000-square-foot plaza for retail and dining.

Taylor said no stores have been signed yet, but restaurants scheduled to open in May include Qdoba Mexican Grill, Five Guys Famous Burgers and Fries, Three Brothers Italian Restaurant, Old Dominion Brew House, Salad Creations, Mongolian Grille, Tokyo and Sushi, Wow Café and Winery and Kudos Beans coffee shop.

The site will include a 57,000-square-foot Safeway, 14-screen movie theater and 2,600 parking spots.

University Town Center, located a mile from the University of Maryland, College Park, is also called home by some Hyattsville residents.

A 16-story, 910-bed student-housing tower has attracted students from the University of Maryland, as well as 11 nearby colleges.

The housing tower, which opened in August and is fully leased, features amenities such as game and computer rooms, tanning booths, a fitness facility and furnished four-bedroom units.

Construction began in June on 112 one- and two-bedroom condominium units from the mid-\$200,000s.

In addition, 22 two-story, luxury loft condominiums, with prices ranging from the upper \$300,000s to \$700,000, broke ground in December and are expected to be completed in May or June, said Taylor.

The first loft sale occurred in October.

“The higher price lofts were the ones that went first surprisingly,” he said. “These are probably the most upscale lofts in the area.”

The center will help put Prince George’s County, the second-largest county in the state, on the map, said Kwasi Holman, president and CEO of Prince George’s County Economic Development Corp.

Holman said the center “will make Hyattsville a very livable community.”

“In addition to excellent student housing and development it will bring much needed retail to the county,” he said. “It seems they have timed it right.”

The first phase of the development, expected to be complete by this summer, will pump at least \$24

million in tax revenue into the state, according to 2004 estimates.

Prince George’s County will receive more than \$7 million annually and the city of Hyattsville will receive an additional \$1.5 million in tax revenue, according to the estimates.

The second phase includes a hotel and another condominium development proposed on property adjacent to the center, slated for completion in 2009.

The third phase, currently in the early planning stages, includes future development across East-West Highway, opposite the center.

Hyattsville Mayor Bill Gardiner said the revitalization is aligned with the needs of Hyattsville and the county.

“We were fortunate to have a visionary property owner, a strong real estate market, a very supportive city council and the recognition by retailers, investors and potential homebuyers of the demand for the center,” he said. ::