

Williamsburg Is Stanmore Owner

The Williamsburg Group bought the Stanmore property recently, giving it 13 single-family homes in the Olney market.

The Columbia builder paid \$2.65 million for the tract, located on Batchellors Forest Road just south of Doctor Bird Road. Good Counsel High School is just across the street and the fireplace dining room at the Olney Inn a couple blocks away. The site plan for Stanmore shows two cul de sacs with lots averaging about 15,000 square feet.

Williamsburg took through approvals a site plan amendment that updated the stormwater management plan, eliminating large ponds in favor of bio-swales. The builder plans to do the development work in-house, starting in the spring.

Williamsburg's nearest competition will be Toll Brothers down the road, where 59 new houses are coming on the former rolling fairways of Trotters Glen Golf Course. Pulte provided comparables for Williamsburg with its own Batchellors Forest job, now completed on the opposite side of the road. This year, Pulte has averaged \$930,000 on 13 closed deals. Williamsburg officials haven't settled on their own pricing yet, but expect it will be from the '\$9's.'

Williamsburg latest job in Montgomery was the towns on a knoll overlooking Baltimore Road in Rockville. The builder averaged \$547,000 on half a dozen 2014 closings at 'Rock Creek Woods.'

Bruce Winston and Aaron Lebovitz at Fraser Forbes Real Estate brokered the deal.

MOVE Expansion Follows Ombudsman

The newly proposed 'development ombudsman' was the first of several pro-business moves that Ike Leggett has announced as he heads into his new term as county executive.

Most notably, speaking at his inauguration, Leggett proposed an expansion of the MOVE leasing program. He also pledged that plans that are 'ready' will be turned around for approval in record time.

Details on both will be more forthcoming, but Leggett says he intends a 'refocus on economic growth,' and an effort to 'put to rest some misperceptions' about the county's business climate. As for MOVE, economic development chief Steve Silverman had testified earlier this year that the program, designed to reward tenants who cross the county border into Montgomery with a \$4 per foot payout, had some takers but hadn't 'moved the needle' as it is written. Silverman said at the time that only substantive changes to the program could broaden its effectiveness. Again, details were lacking as we publish, but Leggett appears to be ready to offer more dollars and to a wider variety of incoming companies.

The ombudsman has been under consideration for a few months. Advocates say such a position could be most useful in navigating the inter-agency policy disputes that can flare up over development proposals. Extending the ombudsman's interaction to state agencies and WSSC would be even more helpful, say industry insiders.

There are reasons to believe that 2015 might prove a good year for advancing the agenda of a more business-friendly county. Clear progress is evident on streamlining a review process that had grown stifling, including the newly installed time limits on plan reviews and bolstering agency accountability at development review committee meetings. An OLO report earlier this year that laid out the time it takes to navigate the system wasn't just a wake-up call; it was a bullhorn at close range. More broadly, Larry Hogan has made regulatory overhaul a part of his campaign platform and he's now installed in the governor's mansion.

And finally, office demand is at a low ebb, as low as it's been in years and way off historical markers. At this point, the need for jobs, and a proactive approach to landing them, is agenda item number one. Leggett's speech will be welcomed, and its outcome closely watched.

Short Takes...

....**With creating a walkable White Flint in mind**, the Council passed legislation that will narrow its urban roads. Bill 33-13 says county roads in urban areas would be reduced in width from 12 to 10 feet, speeds would be capped at 25 miles per hour, and the curb radii, or distance between curbs, would max out at 15 feet. It's partly a symbolic move, stemming from the stand-off over the width of state road Old Georgetown, where 'walkable' advocates want a narrower street more inviting to pedestrians at Pike & Rose (an issue still under discussion). Otherwise, the bill could apply to places like a redeveloped White Oak, bringing happiness to bicyclists and pedestrians.

.....**The Clarksburg Premium Outlets at Cabin Branch** can push forward, say planners. With a recommendation of 'approval with conditions,' the site plan for 450,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space on the west side of I-270 at Route 121 comes this week to the Planning Board for review. Simon Property Group, Streetscape Partners and New England Development have joined forces to propose the outlet center.