

JOB ONE: IMPROVING PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR BRAC

By

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Remember the tag line from Kevin Costner's movie *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, they will come?" Today, as Maryland's elected officials and planners contemplate the arrival of the BRAC workforce, the promise – and challenge – of BRAC can be summed up this way: "They are coming, whether we build it or not." And the "it" refers to the water, sewer, transportation and public services infrastructure improvements which must be made – soon – if Maryland's BRAC-induced expansion is not to become a Smart-Growth planner's nightmare.

Maryland officials expect the state to gain 60,000 jobs and 28,000 households directly or indirectly from the expansion of military installations in Maryland. About 14,500 workers, consisting of highly skilled scientists, engineers and researchers, are scheduled to arrive in Maryland over the next eight years, to staff a host of newly constructed or expanded defense research facilities which have been ordered to be relocated in the state, primarily at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, in Harford County, and at Ft. Meade, in Anne Arundel, as part of the latest round of the Pentagon's national base realignment plan. About 27,500 workers will follow close behind, to be employed by a host of defense-related contractors and other support enterprises, relocating "outside the fence," but in close proximity to APG and Ft. Meade. Another 18,000 jobs are projected to be created by businesses that will expand to support the increased population. In fact, the move already appears under way. Last month Army officials said plans were on hold to transfer the first contingent of workers from the communications and electronics research center at Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey, but on August 17th the Army reversed course and announced that it would proceed with an early transfer of 32 jobs from Ft. Monmouth to APG.

While every jurisdiction in the region hopes to benefit from this influx of jobs and wealth, few doubt that, for good or ill, the impact will be concentrated in Anne Arundel, Harford and Cecil Counties. For example a recent report by the Maryland Department of Planning projects that Harford County faces the greatest growth pressures. The report projects an influx of about 35,000 jobs, and about 6,500 households within a 45 mile radius from APG. Cecil County, with a present population of about 100,000, is projected to receive at least 2,000 of the BRAC-related household growth, in addition to significant growth in its job base. A sizable portion of Cecil's jobs and household growth can be expected to be located at the planned community of Bainbridge in Historic Port Deposit, which is being developed on the 1,200-acre former Bainbridge Naval Training Center, where up to 4 million square feet of commercial space, 1,250 housing units and a 1,000-unit retirement community are planned. Another 1,000-acre business park is also planned in Cecil, on Route 40.

Lately, the need for transportation infrastructure improvements has captured the attention of both politicians and the press, and hardly a day goes by without a reported comment on the need to expand MARC service north to Harford County and south to Odenton, or to improve the road network serving Ft. Meade. But the key impediment to the region's success in assimilating the BRAC-induced growth is not the condition of the transportation infrastructure but the present and projected inadequacy of public water and sewer systems. This is because, more than any other factors, the adequacy – or inadequacy – of public water and sewer service will dictate what gets built, and where, to serve the BRAC workforce. And in this regard the risks for Harford and Cecil are particularly great.

The master plans currently in place in both Harford and Cecil concentrate commercial and residential development within designated growth areas, predominantly bounded by the I-95 and Route 40 corridors. In marking these areas for dense residential and commercial growth the counties' planners hope to redirect development pressures away from rural areas. The success of both master plans is dependent upon providing sufficient public utilities infrastructure within the growth areas so that the expected growth and development can be accommodated there, and not be deflected into the rural areas. But the projected BRAC-induced growth threatens to overwhelm the counties' existing public water and sewer and sewer capacities in the growth areas. For example, according to the recent report by the Maryland Department of Planning, BRAC-induced residential growth in Harford is expected to absorb as much as two-thirds of the high-quality housing in the county's designated growth area. The report suggests that the county's smart-growth management plans could be overwhelmed by lack of infrastructure, since Harford and its municipalities face water-supply limits or shortages. According to the report, water capacity at Bel Air and Aberdeen is inadequate; and Aberdeen's plans to solve its water supply problems by desalinating [Chesapeake Bay](#) water have not been approved, and may not be approved and completed by the time new workers and their families arrive at APG's doorstep. In Cecil the problems are even more acute, and affect both water and sewage capacities. State environmental officials have proposed putting a ceiling on sewage treatment plant discharges to reduce nutrients fouling the Chesapeake Bay. But county officials say the treatment plant caps could stymie efforts to contain residential sprawl. County officials stress that their success in channeling growth within the county's growth area will largely be determined by the county's success in accommodating the need for water, sewer and other utilities infrastructure within the growth area, which will in turn depend on convincing state officials to cooperate with the county in setting or enforcing treatment and emissions standards for existing sewer systems within the growth area. Meeting with the O'Malley administration's base realignment subcabinet, in late July, county officials speculated that if such cooperation was not forthcoming, so that growth could not be accommodated within the growth area, then rural development pressure might prove irresistible, resulting in increased loss of contiguous agricultural land, greater private well and septic development, road congestion and the destruction of the county's rural character.

The price tag for the solutions to these demands is likely to run to the billions of dollars, and state, county and municipal officials are now playing beat the clock to find the money to fund realistic public infrastructure improvements in time to make a difference for the new BRAC arrivals. Because, ready or not, they are coming.

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