

# A Shopping Nexus Outside Washington Plots a Future as an Urban Center

By EUGENE L. MEYER

TYSONS CORNER, Va. — This intersection in Fairfax County is a mecca for shoppers: it is the Washington region's largest retail center, with 5.9 million square feet of shopping, and it includes the country's 10th-largest mall. It is also due for a major makeover — after the sinking economy rebounds.

In October, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors accepted the recommendations of a 36-member task force that had labored for three years on a plan to turn this traffic-clogged maze of malls and office parks into an urban center that has more housing and is less dependent on cars. This month, the supervisors said they would move quickly in 2009 to pass regulations allowing for greater density, consistent with the long-range plan for Tysons.

The plan has been widely applauded as a forward-thinking blueprint to convert this "edge city," 13 miles from downtown Washington, into the epitome of "smart growth" by 2050. The area is ultimately envisioned as having high-rise apartments adjoining four new rail transit stations built along an extension of the Metro system, shuttle buses, a pedestrian-friendly street grid, urban parks and outdoor plazas.

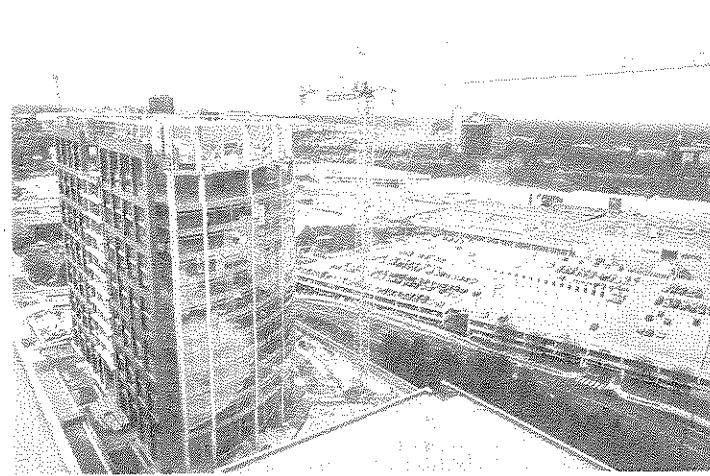
The plan aims to be a guideline to be followed over decades, which is fortunate, because it was being completed just as the econ-

omy took a sharp downturn.

Macerich, a national shopping center company based in Santa Monica, Calif., now owns the 300-shop Tysons Corner Center, the original mall here. The company has short-term plans, which were approved by the county in January 2007, to turn acres of parking into 3.4 million square feet of office, hotel and residential space and some additional stores. But it is not clear how soon this will happen. "Our plans are really tied to market demands," said John E. Harrison, the vice president for development at Tysons.

Similarly, Theodore N. Lerner, the developer who built Tysons Corner Center as well as Tysons's second major mall, has indefinitely postponed constructing an office building here — his fifth, announced by his firm two years ago — "due to current economic conditions," he said in an interview.

As it stands, Tysons is the nation's 12th-largest employment center, based on its 26.7 million square feet of office space, according to an analysis by Integra Realty Resources. Altogether, there are 115,000 retail and office workers and 17,000 residents at Tysons. This ratio is "just out of whack," said Stuart Mendelsohn, a land-use lawyer, former county supervisor and task force member. If the plan is carried out, by 2050 Tysons will have an estimated 150,000 full-time residents, who will be able to walk to work,



A new office building at 1850 Towers Crescent Drive is going up next to the Tysons Corner Center shopping mall.

restaurants and shops.

Today, nearly half of Tysons's 1,700 acres are streets and parking. In all, the area has more than 35 million square feet of commercial space, more than the downtowns of Miami, St. Louis or San Diego.

The once rural "corner" that defines Tysons is the intersection of Routes 7 and 123, now major commuter routes in Washington's Virginia suburbs. The Capital Beltway, the highway ringling the nation's capital, adjoins Tysons, and Dulles International Airport is a short toll road away. "All roads really lead to Tysons," says Christopher Gladstone,

president of Quadrangle Development, a Washington firm active in the area.

The coming of the Beltway in the mid-1960s made Tysons Corner accessible to shoppers across the Potomac River in Maryland as well. In 1968, Mr. Lerner opened Tysons Corner Center, and in 1988, he opened Tysons II, now known as the Galleria, a more upscale version of his original mall. Mr. Lerner, who owns the Washington Nationals baseball team, has since sold both malls but remains a substantial landholder in the area.

The growth of Tysons has slowed with the economy. This

year, one new office building has been completed, though it awaits approvals before occupancy. This 325,000-square-foot structure, known as Park Place II, adjoins a future Beltway exit. About 10 percent is leased, to the Washington law firm of Hogan & Hartson.

One other Class A building is under construction: a 13-story, 295,000-square-foot office tower at 1850 Towers Crescent Drive. As yet, it has no tenants. It is being built by Quadrangle and is to be completed next August.

No other new projects are expected for a while. "In this environment, this is it, until the economy turns around and there is a need for additional space," said Robert H. VeShancey, a managing director for the leasing agent, Jones Lang LaSalle.

When completed, the Towers Crescent project will include a pedestrian bridge to the sprawling Tysons Corner Center. The mall, in turn, will link to one of the four new Metro stations, which are scheduled for completion in 2013. A 300-unit apartment building will ultimately be part of the Towers Crescent complex, but its start awaits an upturn in the market, Mr. Gladstone said.

Work on the long-term plan for Tysons began when the economy was flush with optimism and cash. Over three years, the Tysons task force held 45 meetings, leading to this fall's final report. The task force's vision has generally been applauded, al-

though some critics contend it is too heavily weighted to the wishes of developers and that it plays down the potential impact of the traffic and the need for infrastructure improvements in the face of rising density.

"We were supposed to protect the neighborhoods," said Amy L. Tozzi, a retired federal employee who lives in a nearby condominium and who was a citizen representative on the task force. "Instead, the developers held sway."

As the task force work progressed, 30 Route 7 property owners, including several car dealerships, joined to devise a single redevelopment plan that is consistent with the committee's recommendations. Their chief architect is Doug Carter of McLean, Va. "Tysons Corner can become a textbook example of how to turn an absolute planning catastrophe into a textbook example of ecologically sensible, sustainable architecture," Mr. Carter said.

The Metro stations could be a catalyst to such an end. But ultimately, even the boosters acknowledge, the grand designs of planners remain subject to the laws of supply and demand.

"What is the status of the market when Metro arrives, and who's willing to build on speculation then?" Mr. Carter said. "This very much depends on market forces, the reality of life. If the market's not there, that will slow things up."