

The Work That Will Bring Cave-Aged Gruyere

Construction Starts on Potomac Town Center, Which Aims to Fill a Gap in Upscale Shopping and Dining

By [Nick Miroff](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

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Epicureans, one of [Prince William County's](#) fastest-growing and most frustrated communities, have good reason to break out the wine and cheese this week.

Construction is underway on Potomac Town Center, the much-awaited [Woodbridge](#) project designed to narrow the county's luxury deficit -- one that often drives well-to-do residents elsewhere in search of fine dining and upscale shopping.

Gourmet grocer Wegmans is the first structure being built on the site, and development executives expect the store to be open for goat cheese and pinot grigio by next spring. They tout the mixed-use development as "a new lifestyle center," with more than 600,000 square feet of high-end retail, office space, luxury housing and a hotel across from Potomac Mills Mall along Interstate 95.

"The days of [Prince William](#) being a lower-cost stepsister to other counties are gone," said Richard Lake, a partner at Roadside Development, the D.C.-based real estate firm developing the site. "The market is ready in Prince William for quality retail and lifestyle retail."

The county's demographic profile has changed, Lake said, and its well-heeled inhabitants deserve better. The median household income is the seventh-highest in the nation, yet the vast majority of its shopping and dining options are, Lake said, "big-box and discount-level retail options."

"Prince William used to be seen as a low-cost entry into the D.C. housing market," Lake said. "Now we're seeing residents choosing to live here because of quality of life. Income levels have grown tremendously, the housing stock has matured and people have more disposable income," he said.

"There's a large population on Interstate 95 that has no place to shop right now," Lake added.

Roadside's equity partner in the deal is BlackRock Inc., a global investment firm that manages more than \$1.1 trillion in assets. In March, the company purchased the 90-acre property from Mills Corp., which owns Potomac Mills Mall.

BlackRock Director Chris Carbone depicted the Town Center as "a place that will provide a sense of community, a workplace and a way of life."

The companies would not say which additional retailers plan to open at Potomac Town Center, but a large department store and a major bookstore will be two of the anchor retailers. Plans feature what the developers say will be a pedestrian-friendly Main Street with outdoor dining at

sidewalk tables and a vibrant urban atmosphere fueled by hundreds of upscale housing units. The entire project should be complete by spring 2010, Lake said.

County officials praised the project up and down.

"We're really excited," said Supervisor Michael C. May (R-Occoquan), whose district includes the development site. "It's great news for county coffers because all those people will be spending money inside the county, and we'll see a benefit in terms of sales taxes."

[Board Chairman Corey A. Stewart \(R-At Large\)](#) said the "Reston-style town center" should be the development model for Prince William.

"This is exactly what we want," he said. "The trend is away from separate office parks and retail center and subdivisions and toward a more European-style living where you live within a pleasant walking distance of places, where you shop for groceries, do other shopping and walk to dinner at a nice restaurant."

Potential home buyers are willing to pay more to live in that kind of townlike setting, he said.

"People don't want to be isolated in subdivisions," Stewart said. "A lot of our residents are highly educated, cosmopolitan folks who have lived in [Europe](#), and they would like to live in that type of community here."