

Massive South Lake Development in Bowie, Maryland, Gets Key Endorsement

Project Calls for More Than 1,400 Residents, 500,000 Square Feet of Commercial Development



South Lake would be developed just north of the Bowie Town Center outdoor shopping mall, shown above. (CoStar)

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A mixed-use project designed to bring more than 1,400 residences and over a half a million square feet of commercial development to south Bowie, Maryland, is getting a key endorsement before it goes in front of the Prince George's County Planning Board later this month.

This week, the Bowie City Council approved a detailed site plan for the majority of South Lake, a planned development by NAI Michael and Chesapeake Real Estate Group to be located on more than 380 acres at the intersection of Routes 214 and 301, just south of the Bowie Town Center.

The site plan proposes the construction of 1,035 residences to include 563 townhouses, 344 single-family houses and 128 condominiums on 283 acres. The plan also calls for a 5,272-square-foot clubhouse, pool and other recreational facilities.

In all, the massive development calls for 550,000 square feet to 620,000 square feet of office and retail space, three hotels with a total of 375 to 400 rooms, and 1,475 residences, including 115 units for senior housing.

Though the vote centered around the residential development, community members' concerns were focused on the project's commercial component. Namely, how much of it there is expected to be.

Jacqueline Grazette, chairwoman for a civic group called the Prince George's Citizens for Smart Development, told the council Monday that, after meeting with the developers, her group remains opposed to the project in its current form. She said NAI Michael and Chesapeake should rethink the need for more than 500,000 square feet of commercial development, specifically given the changing retail landscape.

"Pier I has closed and gone to bankruptcy," Grazette said. "Macy's has announced more Maryland stores will close, and Lerner's, that owns several of the stores within Bowie Town Center, may close some of those" locations. The need for more retail, she said, is "where we seem to remain far apart."

Debate over development of the site has raged since 2004. One idea the parties agreed on was the need for a high-end, full-sized grocer, such as a Trader Joe's or Whole Foods. Kevin Kennedy, vice president with NAI Michael, said a quality grocer has been the company's No. 1 leasing target. Though he could not share which grocers the firm had been in discussions with, he said it would be the first tenant the company signs at the project.

"One note that was passed to me, and I don't mean to put you on the spot, is that it was said that another Wegmans has been secured for South Lake," asked Mayor Timothy Adams.

"I can't confirm or deny those rumors," the development team said in response.

An idea Grazette brought up was the possibility of reengaging with Amazon to bring the company to Prince George's County. The Seattle-based retail giant had considered opening a 4 million-square-foot fulfillment center at Westphalia Town Center before [community outcry led the company to withdraw its plans](#).

"The Trade Zone Avenue has tremendous warehouse capacity. Is it possibly to consider reengaging around that? In exchange, would it bring one of its smaller Whole Food stores to us?" Grazette said.

Additional concerns included traffic issues, protecting existing trees, the need for a new high school and more dedicated senior housing.

In giving a nod to the detailed site plan, Councilmember Roxy Ndebumadu noted that the council was "not here to approve or decline whether South Lake is going to happen. South Lake is going to happen whether Bowie City Council takes a stand or not. Our position here is to approve or decline the site plan, whether it meets the requirements of the law."

In 2018, the city council approved an agreement to annex the land and designate the area as a tax increment financing, or TIF, district. As part of the negotiation, the council agreed to approve any future development as long as it was consistent with the concept plan for South Lake, then known as Karington.

Councilmember Michael Esteve, one of two council members to abstain from the vote along with Councilman DuFour Woolfley, said he remains "completely opposed" to the project, saying he has been against it since before a 2017 meeting that promised \$10 million in future tax revenue to the developers to build something "that does 180 degrees the opposite of what our residents have been asking us to do for the last 4 years."

"It does not make sense for the council to not have a seat at that table in this development so it could end up looking like Bowie Town Center," Ndebumadu said. "Have you seen Bowie Town Center? We don't want that."

The South Lake development is expected to take seven to 10 years to build, with the first phase of residences and retail space expected to be completed by the end of 2021.

The development is scheduled to go in front of the county planning board on March 19.