

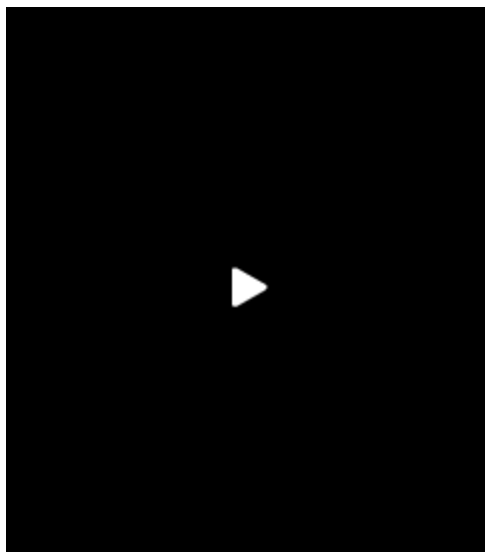
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More than 200 people were on hand at a meeting Monday that addressed a development project by Corporate Office Properties Trust at the former Fort Ritchie U.S. Army base. (Credit: Joe Crocetta / Staff Photographer)



Chuck Fiala, senior vice president of government services for COPT, discusses the plans in place for the makeover of the former Fort Ritchie during a public meeting Monday night on the site. (Credit: Joe Crocetta / Staff Photographer)



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## Fort Ritchie project presented to public

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CASCADE - More than 200 people attended a meeting Monday night to hear about the current development plan for the former Fort Ritchie U.S. Army base in Cascade.

The plan was approved in December by the Washington County Planning Commission, and will bring 1,400 jobs to the surrounding area in the next nine years.

In addition to job creation, the meeting also focused on the new community center that is under construction and historic and environmental preservation.

The plan includes 673 residential units, 1.7 million square feet of office space and 20 acres for community use.

PenMar Development Corporation was created in 1997 to oversee the conversion of the former army base, which closed in 1998 as part of the Base Realignment and Closure Program. Corporate Office Properties Trust (COPT) of Columbia, Md., purchased the property in two phases beginning in October 2006, according to Chuck Fiala, senior vice president of COPT.

Fiala said COPT's vision of Fort Ritchie is "to create a first-class community that you can go to work, live on campus and recreate on campus."

COPT is a leader in green development, and the Fort Ritchie redevelopment project is the first project in the county that will be certified as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), Fiala said.

The 21,000-square-foot community center, which is a joint project between the two companies, is expected to be completed by July, 4, but will not be open for use until September, said Rich Rook, executive director of PenMar.

PenMar has given \$2.2 million to the \$5 million facility, which will include meeting rooms, a gym and weight center, gaming room, snack bar and a terrace overlooking sports' fields.

"(We're designing a) first-class community facility that you will find nowhere else in this region," Rook said.

Some of the planned amenities for the redevelopment of the former

Chuck Fiala, senior vice president of Corporate Office Properties Trust (COPT), of Columbia, Md. talks about the approved development plan for former Fort Ritchie, a former U.S. Army Base. **(Credit: Ashley Hartman / Reporter)**

army base include a hotel/conference center, a day-care facility, the community center, lakeside nature trails, and baseball and soccer fields, Fiala said.

The goal of the redevelopment also includes creating 1,400 new jobs in the next nine years and 4,500 new jobs in the next 15 to 20 years, Fiala said.

The center of the park will be a restricted business area, and wrapping around that will be housing development. Also, 250 of 591 acres will be set aside as forest preservation.

Jack Simpson, chairman of the Museum Committee with PenMar, said that a building at Fort Ritchie has been chosen for a future museum, which is in the planning phases.

"As you drove in, on the righthand side, that little house on the side is actually the site that we picked out for the museum," Simpson said. "It's Building Four."

COPT has agreed to bring the house up to specifications in terms of donating the building and doing work on it, Simpson said. PenMar has agree to set aside \$450,000 for the development of the museum and preliminary plans are being drawn up.

The museum likely would include artifacts from Camp David, the history of Fort Ritchie and the battle of Monterey Gap, Simpson said.

Two-thirds of more than 60 buildings in the historic district have been stabilized, said William Hofmann, senior property and environmental services manager for COPT, and not many of them had to be demolished, he said.

Three tenants included in the redevelopment project so far are Indus Corporation of Vienna, Va., Microtech Solutions of Smithsburg and Hagerstown Community College, which plans to start classes there in March.

The Fort Ritchie redevelopment project is projected to take between 10 and 15 years.

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