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## **Fair Hill on schedule to be completed by spring in Olney**

### **Businesses, residents hoping renovated shopping center will breathe new life into downtown area**

by Terri Hogan | Staff Writer

*This story was corrected on Oct. 7, 2010. An explanation of the correction follows the story.*

Panera Bread has joined the growing list of retail stores and restaurants coming to the Fair Hill shopping center, which is on target to be completely renovated by spring.

Businesses and residents are eager for the shopping center, built in the 1980s and formerly known as Olney Town Center, to be finished, and anticipate it being an important step in changing that part of Olney into a destination spot.

The shopping center is located in the heart of Olney at Olney-Sandy Spring and Spartan Road.

The Olney Town Center Advisory Committee worked with shopping center developer and owner Carl M. Freeman Companies to create a long-term concept based on goals set in the master plan, including mixed-use development, a civic center and a town commons area. Because of the struggling economy, the plans were scaled back.

Instead of creating a smaller version of Rockville Town Square or Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Freeman opted to bring in new tenants and renovate the existing shopping center.

Although not the extensive plan it had hoped for, the Olney Town Center Advisory Committee has given the project its blessing.

"We look forward to the completed renovations of the shopping center and are pleased with the progress made so far," said Bob Beard, committee chairman. "We are especially excited about the plaza area that will be used for concerts and other community events."

Panera Bread, along with an undisclosed ice cream shop and Grill Marx, a locally owned steak and seafood restaurant, will surround the center's central plaza area, which Freeman sees as the centerpiece of the project.

Michael T. Reilly, senior vice president of retail at Freeman, said the plaza area will offer outdoor seating and a fountain as its centerpiece.

He said it will be a splash fountain by day and be adorned by colored lights at night.

"It's really neat, and something we are really excited about," Reilly said.

The three eateries are expected to be open by early spring.

Construction on the Harris Teeter grocery, one of the center's anchors, is ahead of schedule.

"They are now under roof and are excited about this location and are moving as fast as they can," Reilly said. "Construction can always take funny turn, but we were projecting completion in June and right now it looks like it will be April."

Construction continues on The Greene Turtle, which will anchor the opposite end of the center. The restaurant, which is expected to open in mid-November, also will feature an outdoor dining area.

Reilly said the entrance to the center includes pavers in a radius pattern to enhance the shopping center's pedestrian friendly design. Other highlights of the \$10 million project include aggregate sidewalks and extensive landscaping.

"You are going to see a level of detail here that you normally don't see in shopping centers," he said.

Also coming soon

The Hair Cuttery, located across Route 108 in The Shoppes of Olney, will open a second location in Fair Hill.

Existing Fair Hill tenants, including Sol Azteca, Fancier Nails and Spa, Venus Spa and Salon, My Eye Doctor, Subway, Moss Chiropractic, Town Cleaners and Nation's Carpet and Rugs are staying at Fair Hill. The center is 95 percent leased and negotiations continue to fill the few remaining spaces.

Embroidery Express remains open but plans to relocate to the Madison Building, formerly owned by Freeman and undergoing renovations on the nearby corner of Georgia Avenue and Olney-Sandy Spring Road.

Embroidery Express owner Shannon Gorman said it has been exciting to see the renovations progress.

"You see new changes every day," she said. "It is just amazing at how many people are working and the number of hours they put in."

Gorman said the construction has had an impact on consumer traffic since some people do not realize that several of the merchants have remained open.

"I think it's going to be really nice when it's all finished," she said.

She expects to move to her new location in January.

Chipotle, Five Guys and Hypnotic Hair Salon also will occupy the building, which formerly housed the Cuckoo's Nest and Madison's restaurants.

PNC Bank, undergoing a face-lift to match the décor of the Fair Hill shopping center, will remain in its freestanding building along Olney-Sandy Spring Road, as will Capital One Bank.

Kentucky Fried Chicken/Taco Bell will not remain as free-standing fast-food restaurants in front of Fair Hill.

"KFC is not a part of our long-term plan," Reilly said, adding Freeman is looking for another tenant.

Reilly said he is excited about the tenant mix and said the company brings a unique perspective because

it is headquartered in Olney and many of the employees live in the community.

"This gives us really great local knowledge and helps us to know what types of places to bring in," he said.

The adjacent Olney Village Center, also owned by Freeman, underwent a major renovation in 2003.

With the latest project comes the hope of revitalizing the Olney shopping district and bringing new life to merchants.

"The Olney Chamber of Commerce hopes that the renovations will bring more people into Olney to patronize both the new businesses, as well as those who have been here for years," chamber Executive Director Virginia Mauk said. "Anything that helps the local economy will be welcomed."

Mauk said many local businesses are suffering because of the downturned economy.

"A lot of them are having a hard time now," she said. "They can't support the community without the community supporting them."

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*Correction: A previous version of this story incorrectly stated Freeman still owned the Madison Building*