



Staff photo by Ric Dugan

Frederick County is working with Frederick and Brunswick to get transit-oriented development designations around the East Street and Brunswick MARC stations. Railroad Square is an example of dense development that is next door to the MARC station.

County, cities look to increase development around transit

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Frederick County is looking to increase the density of development around the four MARC train stations in the county.

Frederick's City Council unanimously approved a resolution for the city's staff to work with the state for a designation of the area around the East Street MARC station for transit-oriented development, or TOD, at its meeting Thursday night.

The MARC station is within the city's 2020 comprehensive plan's density enhancement area, Division Manager of Community Planning Brandon Mark told the council.

About 3,100 of the 6,500 housing units within the city's development pipeline are within the TOD designation area, he said.

Heather Goddard, president of the residents' group East Frederick Rising, told the council that her group has worked with the city's planners and supports the TOD designation for the area around the station.

As the area adds more walkable and compact neighborhoods, more mixed-use development will thrive, she said.

"This designation is going to help us unlock a lot of potential on the east side of Frederick," Goddard said.

District 5 Council Member Sarah Hempel Irani asked if the designation would allow taller buildings outside the city's historic district.

The TOD designation wouldn't change any local zoning or other laws, Deputy Director of Planning Gabrielle Collard said.

But the application stresses that the area around the station is a place where the city wants to focus on redevelopment and in-fill development, as well as increased density, she said.

But any changes to density, height or other rules would require a lot of community discussion before they were approved, Collard said.

The county wrote in a recent letter to the state about its transportation priorities that it is working with the cities of Frederick and Brunswick to acquire transit-oriented development designations for the areas around the MARC train stations in

those cities, along with seeking a designation for the area around the Point of Rocks MARC station.

The Monocacy MARC station off Md. 355 south of Frederick received a TOD designation in July 2025.

Transit-oriented development is a philosophy of building dense development with a mix of residential, office, restaurant, and retail uses that encourage the use of transit, walking, and bicycling rather than driving.

It is generally built within a half-mile of a transit hub or along a transit corridor, and uses sustainable growth strategies to encourage economic development, reduce sprawl, and maximize the investment put into transit services.

A project built around TOD principles locates its most intense development near transit, and uses diverse land uses and elements to create a vibrant sense of place.

In September, Gov. Wes Moore issued an executive order that made transit-oriented development a priority in an effort to increase housing in the state, including directing the housing and transportation departments to identify state-owned parcels that would be good for building housing near transportation centers.

Among the other elements in the order, it directed the Department of Transportation to work with local jurisdictions to make sure their planning processes for transit-oriented development support housing as a priority use.

Achieving TOD designations for the areas around the county's MARC stations should help "promote efficient implementation of dense, mixed-use development around the State's existing transit assets," according to the county's letter to the state.

But that development would not look the same around the different stations.

While most people think of it in a more urban environment, the general goal of TOD is simply to create a more walkable environment that's accessible for bicyclists and pedestrians, said John Dimitriou, the project lead for implementing the Livable Frederick comprehensive plan in the county's Division of Planning and Permitting.

"There is kind of a spectrum" of solutions for areas as different as downtown Frederick and Point of Rocks, he said.

In a more rural, much less dense community such as Point of Rocks, TOD can take more of a "village center" approach, focusing on pedestrian and bike access to the train station, he said.

Uses such as a convenience store where someone could pick up a sandwich or something for dinner would help meet the philosophy's goals.

Meanwhile, the area around the Brunswick MARC station has strong potential to take advantage of TOD, Dimitriou said.

The downtown's older building stock can serve a mix of commercial and residential uses, and could easily add more dense and new housing, he said.

The Residences at Railroad Square apartment complex in Brunswick provides 45 units next door to the MARC station.

The community's website highlights its "easy access to Brunswick and its many amenities" and the walkability of the complex to the C&O Canal towpath and multiple restaurants.

As the Railroad Square project shows, the goal of TOD is to make cars an option, rather than a necessity, according to Dimitriou.

"There are definitely many flavors you can take" in building TOD, Dimitriou said.

County Council Member Jerry Donald, whose District 1 includes Brunswick, said the Railroad Square development has been positive for the city's downtown.

The 20th century was very car-oriented, but planners must find a way for transit to work for people, he said.

A lot of younger people want to be able to live in areas like downtown Frederick or Brunswick but be able to take a train and work in Montgomery County or Washington, D.C., he said.

And transit-oriented development can make that happen.

"This kind of thing is really the future in terms of planning and developing things," Donald said.

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