

# Northern Virginia's Crystal City Gets New Life

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In a county known for attracting young professionals to neighborhoods with its vibrant development on Washington D.C.'s Metro corridors, Arlington, Va. planners are hoping a facelift will help a 40-year-old, mixed-use development known as Crystal City compete with the upstarts.

The county is floating a plan to redevelop the 260-acre area, which lies along two major Metro lines and abuts Reagan National Airport. Under consideration is a \$200 million, 20-year overhaul to convert Crystal City's functional configuration of office towers, hotels and underground shops into a lively blend of street-level retail, office space, and residential and open spaces, including a central park.

The plan would allocate \$90 million in the next five years, according to county documents. Funds would go toward parks, street and sidewalk improvements, and a streetcar that runs the district's length and all the way to the Potomac Yard retail area.

Crystal City is home to a million square feet of office space and nearly 60,000 workers. But under the Defense Department's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Recommendations, the area is slated to lose nearly a third of those workers as their jobs move to locations deemed more secure.

In 2005, the area lost nearly 7,000 workers when the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office moved to a new facility in Alexandria, Va.

The mass exodus presents an unprecedented opportunity for a development do-over. While the area houses nearly 6,000 residents, the portion under consideration for redevelopment historically has been void of life on evenings and weekends. The underground malls that were the hallmark of Crystal City's avant garde planning allowed residents to walk to work and shop without going above ground, but the oddly empty streets didn't attract outsiders.

Angela Fox, president of the Crystal City business improvement district, told the Washington Examiner that the area needs the county to lead the planning and build the infrastructure necessary for redevelopment.

County planners are drafting a revised revitalization plan, which will be announced for public review shortly. Meanwhile, county board members are struggling to figure out how to pay for the redevelopment. While some funding will come from private enterprise, the county plans to use local, state and federal money as well, according to the Examiner.

Money continues to be tight: In the Arlington County budget for fiscal 2011, board members approved a 6 percent cut in funding to the Crystal City Improvement District, agreeing to provide \$2.08 million this year for landscaping and beautification, marketing and other expenses.

But developers and business owners aren't waiting for government action. In the past three years, new condominiums with first-floor retail, including a Harris Teeter supermarket, and Potomac River views have been built at the Eclipse on Center Park. And Camden Realty Trust has built a 386-unit, luxury-apartment complex nearby at Camden Potomac Yard.

Street level eateries like Kora and Jaleo also are attracting customers as is the Tony Award-winning

Arena Stage, temporarily housed in Crystal City while construction wraps up at its new home in D.C.

A farmer's market, arts festival and summertime film festivals also lead Crystal City toward a renaissance as a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood.