

With Inova on board, Stonebridge advances new plans for Alexandria's Oakville Triangle

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With a [new healthcare facility](#) set to anchor the [long-stalled development](#) at Alexandria's Oakville Triangle, plans for the rest of the project are starting to come into focus.

Stonebridge is tweaking its proposal for the Potomac Yard-adjacent site along Route 1, convening a series of virtual community meetings on the project over the last few weeks. The Bethesda developer — which is managing the effort on behalf of its owner, the [Blackstone Group](#) — is tinkering with the mix of uses in a bid to respond to both the changing market and the shifting circumstances for the site itself.

Stonebridge had [once planned](#) for a 190-room hotel and a [large retail district](#) on what is now a 13-acre industrial park, with up to 194,000 square feet of shops and restaurants allowed on the site under zoning changes the city passed in 2015. Now, the developer is ditching those hotel plans and scaling back the retail to only 65,000 square feet.

Plans for just over 1 million square feet of residential remain unchanged, but Stonebridge is also re-orienting its retail plans to cluster shops closer to the planned, 115,000-square-foot [Inova HealthPlex](#) — the anchor [Virginia Tech's](#) “Innovation Campus” [once looked to be](#) for the site.

The developer's deal with the university [ultimately fell apart](#), largely over space concerns, helping [JBG Smith Properties](#) (NYSE: JBGS) and Lionstone Investments [secure the Amazon-inspired campus](#) for North Potomac Yard across the street from Oakville. But with that drama in the rearview and Inova on board, Stonebridge Principal [Doug Firstenberg](#) said things are finally moving full speed ahead on the site.

“Virginia Tech was a welcome distraction, and clearly we will be a beneficiary of what they're doing across the street,” he said Thursday. “But now we've redefined the project for this new context.”

Chiefly, that new definition includes what Firstenberg describes as a pivot to “neighborhood-oriented retail.” The new plans cluster retail along Route 1 and Firstenberg said he hopes to attract small shops, local restaurants and maybe a boutique gym or two to the area.

That's a long way off from his previous efforts to attract an anchor like a movie theater or a large fitness center . Firstenberg said he had plenty of interest from those sorts of businesses, but it became increasingly clear that he'd never be able to assemble the sort of “retail district” he initially envisioned — and that was before [coronavirus blindsided the industry](#).

“The world's changed since 2015 and now it's changing again,” Firstenberg said. “We knew that any deal we made with an anchor would require another 100,000 square feet of successful shop space. Even before this year, that seemed like a lot.”

Firstenberg believes the new plans will still provide some much-desired amenities for neighbors, while offering a draw for Inova's workers. The new health facility could someday include an emergency room, medical office space, imaging and a multispecialty surgery center. It's likely to be similar to the Inova HealthPlex near the Franconia-Springfield Metro station, and [supplement services at Inova's Alexandria hospital](#).

With the healthcare center on board, Firstenberg said he also wanted to answer a major ask from the community with the new plans. He's now pitching a 34,000-square-foot expansion of Mt. Jefferson Park on the western portion of the site, connecting with the townhomes planned for the portion of the property closer to single-family neighborhoods.

“This will really help create a great connection between Del Ray and Potomac Yard,” Firstenberg said, noting that work on the latter neighborhood's [new Metro station](#) is finally underway. “And neighbors have made it clear that this what they wanted for a while.”

Firstenberg hopes to deliver the first buildings at Oakville by 2023, kicking things off with the park expansion and then moving to the other construction. He still needs to secure zoning changes from Alexandria City Council, a process he wants to wrap up by early next year, at the latest.

The challenge is that, for now, the developer can only convene virtual meetings to gather community input and chat with city officials while the coronavirus outbreak stretches on. But Firstenberg said he's actually seen a surge in interest in the online presentations he's developed about the property, and may look to hold an entirely virtual town hall on May 7 as his team gets more comfortable with the technology set up.

“I could see a future where we move to these online video meetings much more often,” Firstenberg said. “We could learn some good things out of all this.”