

THE BALTIMORE BANNER

# No meatballs, no maze: IKEA's latest Maryland shop is built for the digital age

Tolu Talabi

8/1/2025 6:02 p.m. EDT



IKEA opened its second Baltimore metropolitan-area store in Hunt Valley Towne Center in Cockeysville on Friday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. (Tolu Talabi/The Baltimore Banner)

You won't need a map or a meatball break to survive this IKEA trip.

The Swedish retailer on Friday opened its second Baltimore metropolitan-area store in Hunt Valley Towne Centre in Cockeysville, the latest version of its small-scale shop made for the digital age.

"Good morning. We have opened our doors, and IKEA is ready for you to explore," store manager Yolie Keck said as customers walked in.

The 2,000-square-foot space is different in more than just size from IKEA's blue box store in White Marsh.

The new location doesn't have products for immediate purchase, a cafe or Swedish meatballs. Instead of a [maze](#)-like journey through a real-life catalog, customers will find two fully designed kitchens, a custom closet setup, drawer sets, countertop designs and cabinet doors.

Customers can order items at a self-serve kiosk or meet with an IKEA employee to design and plan their kitchen, bedroom, bathroom or office space.

David Lefkowitz, 61, and his wife made their way to an employee to order plastic breakfast trays.

"It's nice to know I can place and order here or buy something online and grab it here," said Lefkowitz, who lives in North Baltimore.

Jonathan Dean, local marketing manager for IKEA Baltimore, Conshohocken and South Philadelphia, said the small-format store gives customers a more personal shopping experience.

“Our desire is for our customers to feel we are meeting them where they are and we’re bringing our services even closer to them,” Dean said.

IKEA has similar stores in Annapolis and Gaithersburg, and Hunt Valley has seven employees.



IKEA employees await customers during the store’s grand opening. (Tolu Talabi/The Baltimore Banner)

Big, traditional retailers such as Target, Macy’s and Nordstrom have embraced smaller-scale stores as they try to keep and grow customer bases that have increasingly turned to the internet for shopping.

In 2011, Walmart launched its 12,000- to 15,000-square-foot “Walmart Express” stores to appeal to shoppers in urban markets who were less receptive to large supercenters.

Planning appointments last about an hour, with employees getting to know the customers’ needs and filling in measurements of spaces for the design.

The entire process can take about a year, including planning, implementation and installation, according to Dean. Customers are encouraged to make multiple visits.

Those ordering through the store or online can pick up their purchases at the Cockeysville store or have them delivered to their homes. Dean said orders typically take about a week to ship before arriving at the pickup location.

The site was chosen to be within a 30-mile radius of IKEA’s larger store so customers, especially those in Hunt Valley, Cockeysville and Pennsylvania, would not have to battle beltway traffic or drive to White Marsh.

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Beverly Grigsby, 65, who lives in Middle River, said although the small-scale store feels more personal, there are pros and cons to it.

“If you already know what you want and you live here, it’s a better way to plan and order and pick up conveniently,” Grigsby said. “I prefer the bigger store to touch and feel furniture.”

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Tolu Talabi is an incoming senior at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she is studying journalism and minoring in global studies. She has written for the Capital News Service, The Baltimore Fishbowl, The Diamondback and The Black Explosion, where she's covered social justice, arts, and culture.

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