



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

May 16, 2013

REQUEST: City Council Bill #13-0218/Inner Harbor Project I URP Amendment

For the purpose of amending the Urban Renewal Plan for Inner Harbor Project I to change the land use category for a portion of a certain Development Area in the Renewal Plan, and to revise a certain exhibit to the Plan to reflect this change

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Natasha Becker

PETITIONER: South Charles Holdings, LLC

OWNER: An affiliate of the Abell Foundation

SITE AREA

Site Conditions: The Inner Harbor Project I Urban Renewal Plan area includes the portion of the downtown Central Business District within the approximate boundaries of Lombard Street to the north, Key Highway to the south, Gay Street and the Baltimore Inner Harbor to the east, and Charles Street to the west. The specific area impacted by the requested legislation is the portion of Development area 18 corresponding to Lots 1 and 3 of Block 887. Lot 1 is improved with the former University Specialty Hospital, addressed at 1/11 East Lee Street (though signs on the building identify it as 601 South Charles Street). Lot 3 is improved with the former Walter P. Carter/Carruthers Clinic, addressed at 611 South Charles Street.

HISTORY

The Inner Harbor Project I Urban Renewal Plan was approved by the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore via Ordinance No. 1045 on June 15, 1967. It was last amended via Ordinance No. 13-91, approved February 8, 2013 (Amendment #18).

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The request is consistent with Baltimore City's Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically LIVE Goal 1: Build human and social capital by strengthening neighborhoods.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The subject site consists of two properties: The first is University Specialty Hospital, which until recently was a member hospital of the University of Maryland Medical System and which lies at the corner of South Charles and Lee Streets in South Baltimore. The second is the Walter P. Carter/Carruthers Clinic at 611 South Charles Street and which was also part of UMMS. The

services offered in these two facilities ranged from chronic care to outpatient community mental health services and have been relocated to other UMMS member hospitals, specifically to Kernan Orthopedics and Rehabilitation Hospital and Maryland General Hospital. In the case of its chronic care programs, UMMS relocated those functions in July of 2012. Its mental health services were relocated in January of 2013.

As the properties were no longer being utilized by UMMS, they were sold to an affiliate of the Abell Foundation (Abell). Abell is now pursuing redevelopment options for the site, which is located in the Inner Harbor Project I Urban Renewal Plan (URP) area. Both properties are zoned B-5, which is the highest intensity commercial category found throughout the Central Business District and which allows for the broadest mix of uses. However, the Land Use Plan contained within the Inner Harbor Project I URP is more restrictive than the underlying zoning with respect to these properties. Specifically, these properties lie within Development Area 18, which is designated as “semi-public” and which is limited to institutional and ancillary retail uses, as well as parking. At the time the URP provisions were put into place, this was very likely done to reflect the existing uses at the time – the former Deaton Hospital and an associated medical nursing center.

Given that the property is no longer occupied by an institutional user, the land use restrictions contained in the URP are too limiting and serve as a barrier to its redevelopment. Although Abell has not yet determined exactly what will be done with the property, they have indicated that a substantial portion of the redevelopment product will be residential. Abell does not act on its own as a developer but has partnered in the past with nonprofit developers on a number of projects within Baltimore City. In some instances, they have partnered with charter schools and at one time considered that a viable potential reuse for the site. However, in meeting with the community, it was determined that there was greater interest in residential and neighborhood based retail (at the ground floor).

As such, Abell has requested an amendment to the URP to modify its land use provisions with respect to the portion of Development Area 18 that Abell controls – Lots 1 and 3 of Block 887 only. The legislation seeks to modify the permitted land use from “semi-public” to “commercial-residential.” For reference, Development Area 18 covers the entire block bounded by Lee Street to the north, Hughes Street to the south, Light Street to the east, and Charles Street to the west. The block also contains Christ Church Harbor Apartments and Christ Lutheran Church, which are unaffected by the proposed legislation and will remain “semi-public.”

Staff is supportive of the request because it will facilitate redevelopment of a vacant and underutilized site and because the changes proposed to the land use provisions of the URP align more closely with the site’s existing B-5 zoning designation and with its proposed future OR-2 zoning designation.

The following groups have been notified of the requested action: Otterbein Community Association, Harbor Walk Townhouse Association, Harbor Way Condo Association, Harbor Way East Condo Association, and Harbor Court Condo Association.

**Thomas J. Stosur
Director**