



Catherine E. Pugh
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

January 12, 2017

REQUEST: Frederick Elementary School INSPIRE Neighborhood Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval and Adoption

STAFF: Kyle B. Leggs

PETITIONERS: Department of Planning at the behest of the community organizations and institutional stakeholders of the Frederick Elementary School INSPIRE area.

OWNERS: Mayor and City Council and Multiple Private Property Owners

SITE/ GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: Frederick Elementary School #260, is located in the Mill Hill neighborhood of Southwest Baltimore at 2501 Frederick Avenue and sits on a 3.8-acre site. The INSPIRE Plan area encompasses the neighborhoods within a half-mile around the school although the primary focus is on the quarter-mile around the school. This area includes the neighborhoods of Mill Hill, Shipley Hill, Carrollton Ridge, Boyd Booth, and a small portion of the Gwynns Falls and Carroll South Hilton communities. The approximate street boundaries are Frederick Avenue on the north, Lehman Street on the south, Millington Avenue on the west, and S. Catherine Street towards the east. The southern edge of the area is Wilkins Avenue.

General Area: The area is primarily residential with a mixture of low to moderate income households. The area also includes a mix of current and previous industrial style properties to the north as well as to the south and a large retail area, the Westside Shopping Center, to the east of the school. In addition, the area is served by the nearby Gwynns Falls and Gwynns Falls Trail, located within a quarter mile to the west. The trail is one of the neighborhoods' most significant assets, and is used by hikers, walkers, and cyclists for exercise and recreation. The community is also served by ABC Park located on/bounded by Ashton, Bentalou, and Catherine Streets(s). This city-owned park, which is used by hundreds of kids in the community, is to undergo a major renovation that will include a family fun park, sprinkler pad, play field areas, lighting improvements and more.

Just beyond the quarter mile to the southeast is Samuel F. B. Morse Elementary School located at 424 S. Pulaski Street. This school is slated to close at the end of the current school year and the students from this school will be attending the new Frederick Elementary School.

The INSPIRE area is also located in and near multiple neighborhoods that were a significant part of Baltimore's industrial past. Many of the industrial businesses in the area housed workers from companies that included breweries, butcher shops, and paint factories. Today, most of these types of businesses have

since closed, except for Manger Meats, a meat packing and distribution company located at 124 S. Franklinton Road. A number of the neighboring and nearby properties however, while no longer operating as their original uses(s), do continue to function and operate as industrial businesses. Many of the buildings that once housed these businesses however, are now largely vacant. The former Eigenbrot Brewery located at 1 Willard Street, is one such example. While vacant and no longer in use, the style and location of the building reflects the once, workforce character of the neighborhood.

The residential buildings in the area are primarily row-houses that were built in the late 19th century, consisting largely of houses that are two- or three-bays wide and two-stories tall. According to the City's Housing Market Typology, the housing market is considered "stressed" due in part to numerous vacant houses, lots and vacant buildings throughout the area. A number of these vacant properties are also blighted and affect the overall appearance of the neighborhood. There are pockets of strong homeownership and relative stability however, and opportunities for new development. Saint Benedicts Church, for example, has planned a new 80 to 100 unit affordable housing development located in the 2600 block of Saint Benedict Street, which is also located just two blocks south of the new school. The northern edge of the INSPIRE area, along Baltimore Street – provides easy access to and from downtown Baltimore. The community is also served by a number of local bus routes, including the #20 on Baltimore Street, the #10 on Frederick Avenue, and the #35 on Wilkens Avenue. Moreover, a majority of residents get around the neighborhood by walking, and most students walk to school.

The area is also served by a number of long existing religious institutions in the area, to include Saint Benedicts Catholic Church at 2638 Wilkens Avenue, Mason Memorial Church of God in Christ at 2608 Frederick Avenue, Kedesh House of Prayer Christian Church at 2500 W. Lombard Street, Christian Community Church of God at 2701 W. Baltimore Street , and the St. Thomas Lutheran Church at 339 S. Pulaski Street. The Bon Secours Hospital, located at 2000 W. Baltimore Street also serves as an Anchor Institution for the community, and will be partnering with Frederick Elementary School as their Lead Community School Agency.

HISTORY

Frederick Elementary School sits within the historic neighborhood of Mill Hill and centers on Frederick Avenue. By the 1850s, brewers, butchers, and other industries lined the nearby Gwynns Falls directly north and south of Frederick Avenue. During the early 20th century, the area began to change as industry modernized and streets continued to fill with rowhouses. Today, the longest known row of attached houses in the country – called the "Deck of Cards" because of the 52 intact rowhouses – is located just two blocks south of Frederick Elementary School, at 2600 Wilkens Avenue.

Over the years, the Mill Hill, Shipley Hill, Carrollton Ridge, Boyd Booth, and Gwynns Falls community associations have been active in the INSPIRE area; resident participation in these groups has declined over the years however. Although many of these groups worked together in the past, collaboration and partnerships today can be improved. From 1997 through approximately 2005, many of these groups and other community associations from neighborhoods west and north of the Frederick INSPIRE area worked together through the OROSW (Operation Reach Out Southwest) coalition. Over the last 20 years,

residents in eight southwest Baltimore communities, including those surrounding Frederick, participated in the formulation of two neighborhood-area plans: *Operation Reach Out Southwest* completed in 1998, and the *OROSW Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan* (adopted by the Planning Commission in 2002). Both OROSW plans contain a number of recommendations that community stakeholders remain eager to see implemented. These plans also resulted in the formulation of several committees including crime and grime, education, economic development, and health. Active involvement in each of the neighborhood groups however, as well as OROSW, slowly declined, partly due to staffing changes in City agencies and the transition or aging of community leaders. As a result of these transitions, many of the improvements the community envisioned some 20 years ago have not yet been achieved, and in many ways contribute to the severity and priority of addressing the needs as identified in the INSPIRE Plan. Although there have been some setbacks, new efforts are underway. Renewed attention to sanitation and crime in the community has led to the re-establishment of the crime and grime committee, which now meets monthly.

In addition, a new group, Friends of Southwest Baltimore (FOSB), also began working in the area, focusing first on youth and recreation and then adding issues such as community revitalization, voter registration, and human service needs to their agenda.

Additional planning-related work in the area stems from the Bon Secours' Community-Based Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). As a non-profit hospital, Bon Secours is required to conduct a CHNA every three years to assess the health of the population they serve to ensure that they provide services to address the needs and improve the health of the surrounding community. Bon Secours conducted its latest needs assessment in 2016 and captured the socioeconomic and demographic assessment of the community, as well as the overall indicators of behavioral health in the area. Many findings in the CHNA focus on sanitation, housing, jobs, health and wellness, quality-of-life issues, and community unity; these are similarly reflected in the INSPIRE Plan.

Frederick Elementary School was recently approved to become a conversion charter school at the start of the new school year. Neighborhood kids who live in the area will not have to apply to be accepted to the school, but will automatically be allowed to attend if they live in the nearby community. The new Frederick Elementary School will also be the new school for those students who currently attend or are zoned for Samuel F.B. Morse Elementary School, as the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners voted to close this school at the end of the current school year. The new Frederick Elementary School will have a student capacity of up to 605 students, and will continue to serve grades PreK-5.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The request conforms to the goals and objectives of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically:

- LIVE Goal 1: Build human and social capital by strengthening neighborhoods.

Objective 1: Expand Housing Choices for all Residents

Strategy 6: Create and preserve mixed-income neighborhoods in Competitive, Emerging and Stable neighborhoods with targeted disposition of City properties.

Objective 2: Strategically Redevelop Vacant Properties throughout the City

Objective 3: Maintain and create safe, clean and healthy neighborhoods.

Strategy 1: Implement Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Standards.

Strategy 2: Target housing and sanitation code enforcement using the Housing Typology

Objective 4: Target Neighborhood Planning to Leverage Investment

The request conforms to the goals and objectives of the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, specifically:

- CLEANLINESS GOALS: Towards Our Vision of a CLEAN Baltimore

Goal 1: Eliminate litter throughout the City of Baltimore

Goal 2: Sustain a clean and maintained appearance of public land

Goal 3: Transform vacant lots from liabilities to assets that provide social and environmental benefits.

- GREENING GOALS: Towards Our Vision of a GREEN Baltimore

Goal 1: Double Baltimore's Tree Canopy by 2037

Goal 3: Provide safe, well-maintained recreational space within ¼ mile of all residents.

- TRANSPORTATION GOALS: Towards Our Vision of a MOBILE Baltimore

Goal 2: Make Baltimore bicycle and pedestrian friendly.

ANALYSIS

The 21st Century School Buildings Program

In the fall of 2010, groundwork was laid to address Baltimore City's aging and inadequate public school buildings. Community, education advocacy groups, the school system, and other stakeholders built a coalition of support for legislation and funding to modernize Baltimore's public schools. The promise of replaced and renovated schools is meant to help transform student opportunities and achievement, provide jobs and resources to families, and help revitalize neighborhoods.

INSPIRE Mission and Objectives

Each modernized 21st Century school represents tens of millions of dollars of public investment into the neighborhood it serves.

To leverage this investment, and to enhance the connection between the schools and the surrounding neighborhoods, the Department of Planning launched a new program called INSPIRE, which stands for Investing in Neighborhoods and Schools to Promote Improvement, Revitalization, and Excellence. This planning program focuses on the neighborhoods surrounding each of the schools, specifically the quarter-mile around the schools.

Focusing on a limited geographic area allows plans to concentrate impact around the school so that assets and investments support the school as a community resource, build on each other, and continue to expand further into the neighborhood. Recommendations in the plan don't simply stop at a quarter-mile marker; a guiding principle however, is considering concentration of impact. In this way, the INSPIRE plans respond to the aspirations of the neighborhood and school stakeholders in a way that is achievable.

INSPIRE plans seek to lead to improvements in the environment and in the quality of life for students, their families, and neighborhood residents. The plans will also articulate the community's long-term vision for guiding private investment, and address environmental, social, and economic conditions.

Frederick Elementary School INSPIRE Process

Between August 2014 and October 2016, Department of Planning staff worked with members of the school and neighborhood communities to better understand their neighborhood experiences, concerns, and needs. Through community workshops, surveys, and walking tours, stakeholders have helped inform the recommendations presented here. Feedback from over 125 residents and stakeholders informed the plan.

- On February 11, 2015 Department of Planning Staff held the kick-off INSPIRE meeting for Frederick Elementary School and conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities workshop with representatives from the school, neighborhood, and stakeholder organizations.
- On April 21, 2015 Department of Planning Staff participated in a Community Schools Meeting with the Family League.
- On May 28, 2015 Department of Planning Staff administered surveys to parents, family members, and teachers at pick-up and drop-off times in front of the school; and residents at the Westside Shopping Center. The survey was also given out at meetings and made available online.
- On June 17, 2015 Department of Planning staff held the second workshop with the community and discussed recommendations in the areas of housing, sanitation, transportation, public safety, recreation and open space.
- On July 20, 2015 Department of Planning Staff held a "walkability tour" of the Shipley Hill Community, conducted a similar tour of the Mill Hill community on July 21, 2015, and the Carrollton Ridge Community on August 21, 2015

- On March 4, 2016 Department of Planning Staff met with representatives from the National Resource Network and the Enterprise Community Partners to discuss INSPIRE.
- Between April and July 2016 Department of Planning Staff met with the community to discuss community project ideas and presented the draft recommendations to the community.
- On October 13th and 20th 2016, Department of Planning Staff met with the community to discuss the Green Network Plan strategy and get final INSPIRE feedback.

Staff from City agencies, including the Department of Planning, the Mayor’s Office, Housing and Community Development, Department of Transportation, and the Department of Public Works also participated in meetings and/or the walking tours, and worked with the Planning Department staff to address stakeholder priorities.

Recommendations

There are two categories of recommendations, Primary Walking Routes Standard Improvements, and Frederick Elementary School Area Recommendations.

Primary Walking Routes Standard Improvements

To strengthen the connection between the school and community, the first set of recommendations focuses on blocks that have been designated as “primary walking routes.” Standard improvements along these routes will help ensure that students and other community members have safer and more walkable access to the school.

Through commitments from many City agencies, these key improvements will be made along the primary walking routes:

- Bringing sidewalks up to a safe and standard condition
- Repainting or adding crosswalks
- Installing or repairing ADA ramps at intersections
- Implementing Safe Routes to School
- Assessing crossing guard deployment
- Pruning and planting street trees
- Assessing street lighting
- Boarding open vacant buildings
- Picking up trash and maintaining vacant lots

Frederick Elementary School INSPIRE Area Recommendations

To address environmental, social, and economic conditions, and to help guide future investment, the second set of recommendations is divided into six goals. Recommendations for the Frederick Elementary School Planning Area fall under these goals and strategies:

- **Invest in Housing and Neighborhood Market-Strengthening Development Opportunities**
 - Identify and Support Strategic Redevelopment Opportunities
 - Create and Maintain High-Quality, Affordable Housing for Rent and Sale


- Support and Increase Homeownership
- Remove Blight
- Target Land Use Changes in the Area
- Improve the Quality of Local Businesses in the Community
- Create Defined Neighborhood Boundaries
- **Improve Resident Safety**
 - Reduce Crime through Community-based Activities, Environmental Design, and Partnerships
- **Improve Sanitation**
 - Keep the Neighborhoods Clean
- **Create Environmentally-Sustainable Neighborhoods**
 - Beautify Highly-Visible Public Spaces as a Means to Keep and Attract Residents to the Community
 - Turn Blighted Vacant Lots into Positive Uses to Contribute to the Green Network
 - Enhance Greening through Resident Engagement
- **Create Opportunities for Health and Wellness**
 - Improve and Create New Places for Play and Recreation in the Community
- **Create Connections and Access**
 - Improve Traffic Conditions, Pedestrian Safety, and Transportation Enhancements

It is also important to note that with the planned closure of Samuel F.B. Morse Elementary School, many children will have to walk to and from the Carrollton Ridge Community to attend Frederick Elementary School. As a result, the plan includes a recommendation to create a new student walking path, extending from Helen Street and Dulany Street, and onto the southeast access point of the school grounds at Lehman Street. The plan also includes a recommendation to explore the gating or closure of Lehman Street, as this street has been a site for dumping, and is located just below the school grounds.

NOTIFICATIONS

Staff has notified by email or phone the Mill Hill Community Association, Shipley Hill Community Association, Carrollton Ridge Community Association, Boyd Booth Association, Gwynns Falls Association, and the Fayette Street Outreach Community Association. Staff has also notified Delegate Antonio Hayes and 9th District City Councilman John Bullock. Other City Agencies and/or institutions impacted by this planning process were also notified by email of this action, including the Departments of Housing and Community Development, Transportation, Recreation and Parks, and Department of Public Works, Baltimore Development Corporation, BCPS, Bon Secours Hospital (Community Works Staff), Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers, and Baltimore Curriculum Project Staff.

Copies of the Frederick Elementary School INSPIRE Plan will be available on the Department of Planning website.


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Director