



Catherine E. Pugh
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

STAFF REPORT

September 28, 2017

REQUEST: Robert Poole Building (ACCE & Independence Local #1 Schools) INSPIRE Neighborhood Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval and Adoption

STAFF: K. Reni Lawal

PETITIONERS: Department of Planning at the request of the community organizations and stakeholders of the Robert Poole Building INSPIRE area

OWNERS: Mayor and City Council and Multiple Private Property Owners

SITE/ GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: The Robert Poole Building is located in the Hampden neighborhood in North Baltimore at 1300 W. 36th Street. The primary INSPIRE Plan area (the quarter mile radius) lies mostly on the western half of the neighborhood extending down to the Jones Falls Valley. The half-mile radius around the school encompasses almost all of the Hampden neighborhood and even includes the northeastern corner of Druid Hill Park.

General Area: The Hampden neighborhood is situated just northeast of Druid Hill Park and is bounded by 41st Street to the north, Keswick Road/Wyman Park to the east, and the Jones Falls Valley to the south and west. The mostly residential neighborhood has easy access to the Jones Falls Expressway and a thriving commercial corridor dubbed "The Avenue" along 36th Street. The housing stock is characterized primarily by modest two-story rowhomes, with a sprinkling of semi-detached and single-family dwellings. Historically, the homes in Hampden housed many, if not all, of those working at the mills along the Jones Falls. Today, the neighborhood is among the strongest housing markets in the city. Many new residential developments have been constructed in Hampden in recent years that include new apartment buildings and three-or-four story townhomes. These new apartment buildings and luxury three-and-four story townhomes are very different from what has been mostly worker housing built in Hampden over a century ago.

The Jones Falls Valley to the west of the neighborhood is home to many industrial buildings, many of them former mill buildings. Over the past decade or more, these industrial buildings have been redeveloped into residential, retail and small manufacturing mixed-use spaces, reinvigorating the Jones Falls Valley corridor. Commercial activity in Hampden is located mostly along 36th Street and Falls Road. Many small local businesses have opened along these corridors giving Hampden a Main-Street-like feel. Along the outer edges of the neighborhood is

the historic Rotunda building that has been redeveloped to include multi-family residential, retail and office space.

There are two distinct open spaces in Hampden that are within the half-mile radius of the Robert Poole Building: Roosevelt Park and Buena Vista Park. The 18-acre Roosevelt Park is directly across the street from the Robert Poole building and houses a recreation center, skatepark, ball fields, community garden, playground, and pool. Roosevelt Park is a well-used community asset for Hampden residents, students, and adjacent neighborhoods. Buena Vista Park is a much smaller park on the northern end of the neighborhood, just south of 41st Street, and has a basketball court and a playground. Hampden is adjacent to both Druid Hill Park on the west and Wyman Park Dell on the east. The northeastern edge of Druid Hill Park lies within the ½ mile radius for the INSPIRE area, but significant barriers exist, primarily the Jones Falls, that do not make it readily accessible to the Hampden neighborhood.

The Hampden neighborhood is close to multiple transit options, including bus routes and the Light Rail. There is also convenient access to the Jones Falls Expressway, which allows for easy commutes to downtown Baltimore. Hampden is a very walkable neighborhood as far as accessibility to retail and recreation, but the narrow sidewalks can make traversing the neighborhood uncomfortable. Hampden is traversed by mostly small neighborhood streets, but some of the major thoroughfares in the neighborhood include Falls Road, Roland Avenue, 36th Street, and 41st Street. Small streets like Union Avenue mostly serve local residents, but have become more congested as redevelopment has occurred, especially along the Jones Falls Valley.

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 3: Maintain and Create Safe, Clean, & Healthy Neighborhoods
Strategy 1: Implement Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) standards
Strategy 2: Target housing and sanitation code enforcement using the Housing Typology
- LIVE Goal 3: Improve Transportation Access, Accessibility and Choice for City Residents
~~Objective-1: Create a Comprehensive Transportation Plan to Improve Mobility, Accessibility and Choice~~
Strategy 2: Implement the Bicycle Master Plan to create a complete bikeway system
Strategy 4: Create traffic-calming policies and procedures
- PLAY Goal 3: Increase the Health of Baltimore's Natural Resources and Open Spaces for Recreation and to Improve Water Quality and to Improve Neighborhood Social, Economic, and Environmental Well-Being
Objective 2: Protect and Enhance Baltimore's Natural Habitat and Environmental Resources

Strategy 5: Target sidewalk, lighting and signal improvements near parks and open space

Strategy 6: Develop a plan to reduce trash within and along Baltimore's parks and open space

Strategy 8: Increase Baltimore's green infrastructure by increasing the number of trees and tree canopy size (See LIVE, GOAL 1, Objective 3, Strategy 6)

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. Communities, 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 in 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 in the quarter-mile radius 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 do not simply stop at a quarter-mile marker; a guiding principle 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.

Robert Poole Building INSPIRE Process

Throughout 2016, Department of Planning staff worked with members of the school and neighborhood communities to better understand their neighborhood experiences, concerns, and needs. INSPIRE plans around high schools, such as the Robert Poole Building, are different from elementary and middle schools in that the schools are not zoned as neighborhood schools. As such, many families in Hampden do not engage with the school because their children do not attend either ACCE or Independence. This lack of connection to the school made engagement more difficult than anticipated. Individual conversations and an electronic survey helped the Department of Planning understand some of the issues expressed by community members.

- The Department of Planning held the first INSPIRE workshop in January 2016.
- DOP staff created an online survey to gain feedback from community stakeholders about how they feel about their neighborhood relating to housing, recreation, safety, transportation, and social connectivity.
- Throughout the spring/summer of 2016, Department of Planning staff invited community members to attend several field work days to see firsthand some of what they identify as issues and assets within the INSPIRE planning area. A meeting was held in September 2016 to review all of the fieldwork and survey results.
- DOP staff attended several Hampden Community Council (HCC) meetings to update community members on the status of INSPIRE and solicit input during the process.
- DOP staff also received feedback from the business community through the Hampden Village Merchants Association as some of the issues and opportunities are along the commercial corridor they represent.

Staff from City agencies, including the Department of Planning, Housing and Community Development, Department of Transportation, Department of Recreation and Parks, and the Department of Public Works, also participated in meetings and/or worked with the Planning Department staff to address stakeholder priorities.

Recommendations

There are two categories of recommendations, Primary Walking Routes Standard Improvements, and Robert Poole Building 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
- Assessing crossing guard deployment
- Pruning and planting street trees
- Assessing street lighting
- Boarding open vacant buildings
- Picking up trash and maintaining vacant lots

Robert Poole Building Area Recommendations

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

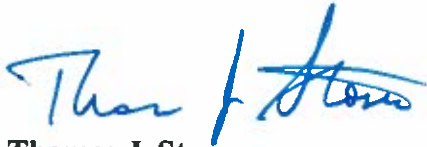
- **Create Connections and Access**
 - Improve Walking and Biking Access and Safety in the Neighborhood
- **Improve Safety**
 - Promote Safety at Key Locations
- **Create Opportunities for Health and Wellness**
 - Improve Recreation Areas
 - Create Connection Between Students and Local Businesses
- **Create an Environmentally Sustainable and Clean Neighborhood**
 - Enhance the Green Aspects of the Neighborhood
 - Keep the Neighborhood Clean
- **Preserve Housing Affordability**
 - Create and Maintain High-Quality Affordable Housing

NOTIFICATIONS

Staff has notified by email the Hampden Community Council, Hampden Village Merchants Association, Skatepark of Baltimore, and the leaders of the 21st Century Schools Team from Baltimore City Public Schools.

We have also notified 7th District Councilman, Leon Pinkett, 14th district Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke, and members of the 40th Legislative District, including Senator Barbara Robinson, Delegate Antonio Hayes, Delegate Frank Conaway, and Delegate Nick Mosby. Other City Agencies impacted by this planning process were also notified by email of this action, including the Departments of Housing and Community Development, Transportation, and Recreation and Parks.

Copies of the Robert Poole Building INSPIRE Plan will be available on the Department of Planning website.



**Thomas J. Stosur,
Director**