



*Catherine E. Pugh*  
Mayor

## PLANNING COMMISSION

*Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman*

### STAFF REPORT



*Thomas J. Stosur*  
Director

**March 23, 2017**

**REQUEST: Arundel Elementary/Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School INSPIRE Neighborhood Plan**

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval and Adoption

**STAFF:** Brenton R. Flickinger

**PETITIONERS:** Department of Planning at the behest of the community organizations and institutional stakeholders of the Arundel Elementary School and Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School INSPIRE area.

**OWNERS:** Mayor and City Council and Multiple Private Property Owners

#### **SITE/ GENERAL AREA**

**Site Conditions:** When these two 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools open in the Fall of 2018, there will be one Pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade school (Arundel) and one 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade school (Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School) serving the primary grades in Cherry Hill. These two schools are within ¼ mile of each other, so these two schools are together in one INSPIRE plan.

**General Area:** The heart of Cherry Hill is composed of two-and-three story residences, including about 1,100 public housing units. In the core between the two 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools is the Town Center, an area with retail and service uses, including an Enoch Pratt Free Library. Also in the heart of Cherry Hill is the Family Health Center of Baltimore. Over a dozen churches serve the neighborhood. The neighborhood is bounded by Middle Branch Park and the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River to the north, Cherry Hill Road and the Light Rail to the west, CSX Railroad tracks and Patapsco Avenue to the south, the Hanover-Pottee Streets corridor to the east. MedStar Harbor Hospital is located east of the neighborhood on the Patapsco.

#### **HISTORY**

Cherry Hill's history has strongly shaped the community that exists today. The area was physically isolated from Baltimore throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the mid-1800s, the area was home to many amusement parks with names such as Kirby Park, Klein's Park, Meeter Park, and Starr's Park. Lincoln Park and Fish House exclusively served African Americans. All the parks offered music, eating, drinking, swimming, and fishing. Inland from the shoreline, several truck farms thrived, and several industries were located along the Curtis Bay Branch line of the B&O Railroad.

With the industrial build-up to World War II, Baltimore increasingly struggled with a housing shortage problem as thousands of African Americans and White southerners migrated to Baltimore, attracted by its high paying industrial jobs. Cherry Hill's close proximity to industry attracted private development in the early 1940s, with developers constructing rowhouse development for African Americans. In October of 1943, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) along with the United States War Housing Administration announced they would build 600 housing units for African American War workers. In 1945, these units were occupied. Shortly after the war, the Cherry Hill Homes were converted to low-income public housing. Cherry Hill was the first African American public housing project designed as a suburban community. By 1980, after decades of adding housing units to Cherry Hill, it was one of the largest housing projects east of Chicago.

Cherry Hill has long been one of Baltimore's significant African American neighborhoods, contributing its share of political leaders, writers, musicians, and others in positions of authority to the City. In the 1990s, the neighborhood went through major changes including the demolition of 1950s-era buildings and the renovations of hundreds more. Large vacant lots remain where hundreds of these units once stood. Though there have been proposals over the years for permanent or temporary uses on these former public housing lots, to date none have moved forward. On other non-HABC properties close to Hanover Street a partnership between the Landex Corporation and the Cherry Hill Community Development Corporation resulted in new construction projects known as Riverfront and Riverview. The Cherry Hill Development Corporation continues to create plans for further additional development projects in the neighborhood.

## **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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

### Arundel/Cherry Hill Schools INSPIRE Process

Beginning in late 2015, 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 150 residents and stakeholders informed the plan.

- On March 22, 2016, the Department of Planning Staff held the kick-off INSPIRE meeting for the Cherry Hill INSPIRE schools and conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities workshop with representatives from the school, neighborhood, and stakeholder organizations.
- Subsequently, a Steering Committee was formed that met several times throughout the process.
- During the spring of 2016, Department of Planning Staff administered surveys to parents, family members, and teachers at pick-up and drop-off times in front of the school. The survey was also given out at meetings and made available online.
- Two workshops were held with middle school students from the two INSPIRE schools in May and June of 2016. At these workshops, students mapped their routes to school, identified problem areas along these routes, and conducted survey work with planning staff.
- Department of Planning Staff also worked with representatives from the National Resource Network and the Enterprise Community Partners, whose staff assisted with one of the community planning meetings.
- During the Fall of 2016, Department of Planning Staff met with the community to discuss community project ideas and presented the draft recommendations to the community.
- On October 3, 2016, Department of Planning Staff met with the community to finalize the Recommendations Report.
- In December, 2016, Planning worked with the Cherry Hill Community Coalition to conduct a voting session for the specific community enhancement project to be funded with INSPIRE bond funds and to review the major recommendations in the plan.

- On March 2, 2017, Planning staff reviewed the final draft recommendations with the Cherry Hill Community Coalition members. Following that meeting, final edits were done with the input of the City agencies listed below. Councilman Reisinger was briefed on the plan March 16, 2017.

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 Cherry Hill Neighborhood 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

#### Cherry Hill Neighborhood INSPIRE Recommendations

To address environmental, social, and economic conditions, and to help guide future investment, the second set of recommendations is divided into six goals with City agency involvement in implementation, and one goal for community-led initiatives. Recommendations for the Planning Area fall under these goals and strategies:

- **Invest in Housing and Market- Strengthening Development Opportunities**
  - Increase Quality Housing Options
  - Promote Strategic Redevelopment Opportunities
- **Improve Safety**
  - Promote Safety at Key Locations

- **Create Connections and Access**
  - Improve Walking Access and Safety in the Neighborhood
  - Improve Street Infrastructure
  - Increase and Improve Public Transportation
- **Create Opportunities for Health and Wellness**
  - Enhance the Healthy Food Environment
  - Improve Recreational Opportunities
  - Improve Community Cohesion
- **Create an Environmentally-Sustainable and Clean Neighborhood**
  - Create a Clean and Green Neighborhood
  - Address Trash and Dumping Problems
- **Provide Opportunities for Economic Self-Sufficiency**
  - Provide training and access to jobs
- **Build and Strengthen Community Assets and Partnerships**
  - Strengthen the Connection between Residents, the Retail and Community Facilities, and Community-based Organizations
  - Expand Recreational Programming
  - Address Education/School/Family/Student Needs
  - Market Cherry Hill

## NOTIFICATIONS

Staff has notified by email or phone the Cherry Hill Community Coalition, an umbrella organization that brings together a number of groups in the neighborhood. The two school principals were also notified. Staff has also notified 10<sup>th</sup> District City Councilman Edward Reisinger, as well as 46<sup>th</sup> District representatives Senator Bill Ferguson and Delegate Brooke Lierman, who were most involved in the planning process. Other City agencies and/or institutions impacted by this planning process were also notified by email of this action, including Baltimore City Public Schools, the Departments of Housing and Community Development, Transportation, Recreation and Parks, Public Works, Baltimore Development Corporation, as well as MedstarHarbor Hospital and Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers.

Copies of the Plan will be available on the Department of Planning website.



**Thomas J. Stosur**  
**Director**