



# REIMAGINING THE HARBOR AS A HUB

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*with Ideas and Input from Public Respondents*

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*“Why shouldn't the harbor, and by extension, Baltimore, be a national showcase for engaging citizens in a cauldron of creativity for addressing the challenges for which we are otherwise infamous, and enjoying life together?” (Reader Response)*

## INTRODUCTION: IT'S ABOUT THE WHOLE CITY

Early in 2021, we wrote an [opinion piece for the Baltimore Sun](#) urging City leaders to engage residents of Baltimore in reimagining the Inner Harbor.<sup>1</sup> Imagine, we asked, “a shared public space that tells our diverse stories with courage and imagination, while sending us out to connect with Baltimore beyond the harbor.” From the Sun’s readership as well as a wide range of people whose ideas we sought subsequently, we received dozens of thoughtful and creative responses from which our themes are derived and whose words are our primary illustrations.<sup>2</sup> Our readers’ words depict the Harbor as a place of joy, frustration, excitement, hope, disappointment, and wide-ranging possibility. They believe, as do we, that what happens to the Harbor matters deeply to all the residents of Baltimore, and that what we do in this moment will have a lasting impact on our City’s civic, economic, and social well-being.

In the pages that follow, we draw on the experiences, concerns, suggestions, and dreams of those who shared their views with us, as we

develop our vision for reimagining the Harbor. We prioritize the experiences and perspectives of Baltimore residents in this process, and believe that an authentic Baltimore vision will also naturally attract visitors and tourism.

Each section below begins with a response from one of our readers, and then addresses related matters for transforming the Harbor into a thriving public place that engages, educates and entertains people who live in Baltimore as well as those who visit our city. We envision the Harbor as a compelling hub for a multi-faceted Baltimore, a dynamic central space that draws people in, and also energizes them to go out and explore the neighborhoods far beyond the downtown waterfront. To paraphrase one of our readers, the Harbor could be ‘a dynamic hub of interpersonal, intergenerational, interracial, and interreligious activity’. Reimagining the Harbor means better understanding and connecting to our entire city in inclusive and courageous ways. A Harbor that engages and

<sup>1</sup>The title given our OpEd by the Sun’s editorial staff “Re-imagining Baltimore’s Inner Harbor as a place for residents rather than tourists” was not our own choosing and led with a controversy and conflict frame that we did not intend and don’t believe is necessary.

<sup>2</sup>We’ve not attributed quotes to specific individuals in this draft paper, but will continue to engage all our original responders as stakeholders (by name if they so choose) as we move forward.

reflects the people and communities of Baltimore will appeal to all who value structures, stories, artwork, and experiences rooted in an authentic place.

We recognize that reinventing the Harbor will not be an easy process. [Harborplace has been in receivership since 2019](#), and the New Jersey-based court-appointed receiver does not seem to care about the increasingly vacant pavilions, which have been battered by a lack of maintenance, competition from Harbor East, and the Covid-19 epidemic. We have heard that a new developer for Harborplace will be announced in the near future, and hope that they, and other private, public and nonprofit entities that participate in planning a new vision for the Harbor's future, will find in this paper a compelling set of ideas to consider. Fortunately, institutions in and adjacent to the Inner Harbor -- the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, Baltimore Civil War Museum, Port Discovery Children's Museum, National Aquarium, Maryland Science Center, American Visionary Arts Museum, Baltimore Museum of Industry, Baltimore Immigration Museum, and Historic Ships in Baltimore, among others -- tell vital local stories and create connections between Baltimore and the larger world. These institutions would benefit tremendously from the Harbor's resurgence as a creative public hub. [The recent opening of the newly renovated Rash Field](#) represents a positive start towards a revived Harbor area with designs that invite locals and visitors, young and old alike, for outdoor recreation and environmental education. Other institutions scattered across the city,

small and large and too numerous to list here, are invaluable to Baltimore's collective story and future vibrancy, but they too often operate in relative isolation from the Harbor's central place. They exist as islands, and suffer the hardships of that disconnection. Our diverse parks and historic markets suffer similar disconnection and underrealized potential as engines of community connection. Now is the time to find the political will, financial means, and planning capacity to engage Baltimore residents in a meaningful and lasting transformation of this shared central space as a hub supporting and connecting our city.

This paper outlines six areas of primary focus clarifying what "matters" as we move forward. Each section then identifies and discusses several key themes, illustrated with quotations from community responses. Our intent is not to be exhaustive or draw conclusions, but to promote the critical importance and creative potential of this moment. We hope this will initiate discussion and action towards a bold and inclusive reimagining process. Although these sections include many and diverse ideas, our conclusion is not to highlight several for top consideration. Rather, holding people and process as fundamental to any successful future for our city, we recommend the appointment of a time-limited and results-oriented "Reimagining Baltimore Harbor" Task Group. This group would be charged and empowered to lead a thorough exploration of ideas and strategies, and report back their findings and recommendations as a first step in launching a public planning process.

## PEOPLE MATTER

*"We have so much history and it all deserves to be heard. But an interactive [exhibit] of Baltimore neighborhoods, from Native American settlements to present day, 'who lived where' and the social factors that reshaped Baltimore neighborhoods, would bring inclusion to Baltimore because we are all one as Baltimore." (Reader response)*

## KEY THEMES

- **Elevate Communities:** Make our "City of Neighborhoods" a central feature of a downtown hub attracting residents and visitors in, and energizing them to explore further out.
- **Highlight Individuals:** Make household names of our diverse talent past and present, the famous and "everyday" alike.
- **Enliven History:** Get creative and off the page; tell all our truths powerfully.
- **Experience Culture:** Not one people, but many; our differences are our strength.

Baltimore is its people past and present. We have an incredible richness of talent, tenacity, and stories to tell. However, to reimagine the Harbor as a hub for all of Baltimore, we have to be willing to value all our people, especially those who have been marginalized or stigmatized. Recognizing the full humanity of ordinary Baltimoreans of all stripes helps us better appreciate their communities, histories, and cultures. In addition, Baltimore is far from even adequately highlighting hometown individuals who have achieved local or national fame. As only one example, Frederick Douglass' life stories from childhood

enslavement, through escape and return, to elder statesman and developer can be traced throughout Baltimore and, although known in certain museum corners and a couple of hard-to-find statues, these Baltimore stories remain largely hidden.

In her book *Come and Be Shocked*, author Mary Rizzo explores hypersegregated depictions of Baltimore in popular culture, and argues that "influential cultural producers should refuse to continue to segregate the two Baltimores into [white working class] Charm City and [poor Black] Bodymore...the reality is

that their fate is intertwined.” In a reimagined Harbor, which could be a place of influential cultural production, a majority-Black Baltimore can find new ways to explore and redefine itself, and connect people, communities, histories and cultures we usually experience as separate and divided. We believe there are rich opportunities to create an expanded sense of belonging and healing that changes our narrative of separation and exclusion.

Several of our readers suggested having many different people and neighborhoods represented at the Harbor, through historic markers, large-scale maps or murals, interactive exhibits, food vendors, and more. They also advocated creating stronger financial and transportation ties between the Harbor and other parts of the City, which fits our redescription of a Harbor that both calls people into downtown and sends them back out. We face the challenge of combining courageous truth-telling about the City’s painful realities with celebration of the many ways ordinary and famous Baltimoreans have created, and are creating, meaningful lives for themselves and opportunities for their communities.

In addition to private and public institutions, we could expand the engagement of social enterprises and social impact organizations, for example featuring youth entrepreneurs and job training ventures. Among our City’s assets are organizations leading restorative practices, intercultural and newcomer population programming, and anti-racism and racial healing work. Engagement of such organizations could inform the process of connecting individuals from different racial, economic and social backgrounds in creating a new and different Harbor. Creative forms of truth-telling and new self-determined stories of people can be a draw for locals as well as our visitors. Places like Monticello and Mt. Vernon that are revising the “mansion estate” museum to feature stories of people’s history, labor, and enslavement could inform our own retelling of Harbor history. Louisville, for example, has installed historic markers downtown creating a [civil rights history trail](#), and along the Ohio River front marking underground railroad passage sites and [“footprints”](#) that evoke stories of those who sought safe passage. A people’s history of Baltimore will hold interest regionally, nationally, and beyond.

## ALONG THOSE LINES, OUR READERS SUGGEST:



*“I love the idea of the Inner Harbor as a place to begin a process of truth and reconciliation! ...in 1971 [I think] the Inner Harbor was a location for the Baltimore City Fair, where neighborhoods came together to celebrate their diverse histories and cultures. They sold products connected with their neighborhoods and, because they were all in one place, they intensely engaged in cross-neighborhood conversations.”*

*“Wouldn’t this be the moment to connect Baltimore’s revitalization across the city and tie them together in that “inescapable network of mutuality” we talk about...This city’s particular appetite for hyper-focus on ‘certain areas’ has kept it tied to a very poor history. Let’s look at the water, the lakes and parks, the harbor et al as the center of our wheel and connected to neighborhood revitalization that is actually beginning to happen all over...and [is] in much need of additional capital, agreement, and equity. What’s not needed is another imbalanced approach in one of the last cities where we could get it right. We need community and cultural competence in a fair economy and Baltimore’s real story and promise can emerge.”*

*“Reminders of the discrimination that minority communities faced before they were integrated into the “melting pot” that we want to take pride in.”*

*“I would like to not only see better representation of the history of the Inner Harbor, but also in the adjacent areas along Pratt Street. If nothing else, embedded ground markers all over the place. I can envision tourists really appreciating that as well.”*

*“We need to begin to think of ourselves as Baltimoreans, as much or more than members of, or advocates for, certain parts of the city or communities.”*

*“Baltimore Club Music, Blacks and Wax Museum, rotating kiosks from food vendors of different Baltimore markets (Cross St, Lexington, etc), art demos, jazz nights.”*

*“As a white person living in a rich white neighborhood, I can say that I can't speak from personal experience or any kind of personal place. However, I hope that we can honor Black revolutionaries -- old and young -- so that Black kids in Baltimore feel honored, respected, and valued...I would also hope that we could include some way to display ALL parts of Baltimore, maybe a map or designation, so that people from everywhere in Baltimore can point and say, “hey, that's where I live!”*

*“I believe that the voices of the people who have been unheard and under-supported, must be centered. Creating fewer bureaucratic barriers for people to create and maintain business ventures are excellent examples. But also, the decisions must include the community as stakeholders.”*



## DESIGN & ECOSYSTEMS MATTER

*"[Provide] an interactive guide to the comprehensive history of the harbor, along with enhanced greenspace and ecological amenities for the benefit of the City and the Bay." (Reader response)*

### KEY THEMES

- **Go Green:** Lead our region with bold plans and teachable spaces for a healthy harbor and aggressive action for stemming climate change and mitigating its impacts
- **Urban Ecologies:** Elevate environmental awareness, experiences of the natural world, and challenges and opportunities of human interaction and impacts.

Viewed from above, the Inner Harbor is a rough rectangle with four piers jutting from the northern edge into the water. Those piers hold the National Aquarium, several restaurants, the Columbus Center, a parking garage, and the Pier Six Concert Pavilion. A wide brick walkway buttressed by pilings circles the Harbor, and there are several docking areas for boats large and small. Downtown rises beyond the western and northern edges, while Federal Hill Park overlooks the southern edge. Expensive residences perch on what once was water to the east of Key Highway. Roughly 250 years of industrial, residential, commercial and recreational use have eliminated the area's natural landscape.

Before Europeans settled here, before the piers, pavilions and walkways, the Harbor was a place of grasses and shoreline and trees, fish and crabs and birds. We can not recreate this lost landscape, but we can recognize its history and value, connect with

restoration efforts along our many miles of local shoreline, and create green spaces at the Harbor itself that would make it a cleaner, safer and more beautiful place to gather. The quality of the water and air have suffered greatly from contaminants in the immediate area, as well as pollutants produced upstream and upwind. The paths, benches, and interpretive signs along the nearby South Point area of the Middle Branch as well as Middle Branch Park and Masonville Cove Environmental Center provide a glimpse of what restored waterfront areas of the Harbor could mirror for enjoyment and educational purposes. The [recently unveiled plans for restoration of the Middle Branch shoreline](#) area should integrate with an environmental education and action plan for the Harbor. Similarly, the Waterfront Partnership is currently [seeking designs for a water trail to be called the Baltimore Blueway](#), with paddle stops and entry points from Canton all the way down and around the Inner Harbor.

Creative design can do much to attractively integrate restored green spaces and waterfronts, recreational trails and pathways, and the adjacent built environment of our city.

As climate change wreaks havoc in flood-prone cities around the world, we should build on existing efforts to improve the Harbor's air and water quality, and also determine what will help the area withstand extreme temperatures and rising waters. Creating permeable surfaces? Coating roofs with reflective paints? Planting hundreds of trees? Digging out the concrete and establishing new wetlands? We need to connect environmental and engineering expertise to the needs and desires of the people who will gather at the Harbor. A newly envisioned and designed Harbor could become a nexus of climate change teaching, organizing, and environmental action for the benefit of all.

As a bold and regional leading move, Baltimore could join the growing global movement establishing [water and nature rights](#) within their home regions. For example, the city of [Toledo, Ohio](#) has recently granted rights to Lake Erie. Extending the vision of Blue Water Baltimore and other advocates, we wonder: Why shouldn't Baltimore Harbor become the leading center for championing a clean and restored Chesapeake Bay? We propose a City Ordinance including "Rights for the Harbor" as a first principle and an organizing tool for regional environmental efforts. We could make our most complex environmental challenges, our moral strengths. A reimaged Baltimore Harbor could also become the hub connecting our robust and diverse park system, our tree canopy initiatives, our waterways, and our emerging trails and greenways system in a single user-friendly community-sourced [Baltimore Green Map](#).

## OUR READERS RECOMMENDED THE FOLLOWING:



*"Increase native plantings including lost cultivars. Present them with informational panels."*

*"Emphasize energy efficiency in all aspects of the new Harbor."*

*"Include all beings including non-human ones! Baltimore wouldn't be Baltimore without the oyster or the crab!"*

*"Demolish harborplace and create a community gathering place connected to the greenway trails pathway with natural elements."*



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*“The New York Times recently had an article on a man who recycled bricks from the demolished Bethlehem Steel plant on Sparrows Point. I would like to see more recycling programs like they have in Austin, Texas, and clean-up days.”*

*“I would like to see more green space. In downtown Baltimore, there is/was a G-O2 Living Wall on the building facade of One East Pratt Street. But having more green space around the Inner Harbor would lower temperatures and improve air quality. The areas would also provide places for children and adults to sit under trees and better urban landscape design would attract tourists as well.”*

*“Monetize ecological improvements like nutrient reduction and habitat restoration to fund improvements.”*



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## PROCESS MATTERS

*“What local foundation in partnership with City governance might fund a full and restorative process that is valued on equal footing with the actual harbor plan itself? That's what we need...resources on the front end for the kind of elevated process we need as a city.” (Reader response)*

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## KEY THEMES

- **Truth-telling:** Facing our history and challenges courageously
- **Rooted in Our Values:** Envision and develop with integrity
- **Strategic:** How we approach engagement and development matters
- **Establish Timelines:** Both for vision process, and for development product

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Broad inclusion and bold truth-telling will enable us to create a Harbor that welcomes, reflects and engages all of Baltimore. While museums and other institutions in the area begin to dig deeper into the diverse histories and cultures that shaped our city and region, the most visible and accessible parts of the Harbor largely fail to connect with the past and present of many people who call Baltimore home.

For example, would a resident or tourist who visited the Harbor pavilions and visitor center today learn that:

- Native Americans lived in and around the Baltimore area for over 10,000 years, and the Patapsco River derived its name from the Algonquian language?
- Between 1815 and 1860, Baltimore was a center of the interstate slave trade and traffickers built pens for their human property along Pratt Street, selling thousands of enslaved people from Baltimore to New Orleans and other southern destinations?
- Second only to New York's Ellis Island in our "nation of immigrants" history, over 1.2 million European immigrants seeking new opportunities for themselves and their families disembarked in nearby Locust Point?

Before developing architectural or programming or business plans, project leaders should invest time and resources up front in reaching out to Baltimore residents. To create a public place that works for all of us, we need to emphasize process before product -- to invite representatives from all parts of Baltimore to share their history, culture, experiences, hopes, disappointments and dreams for the Harbor. We should listen carefully and gather stories and suggestions -- old, new, heartbreaking, uplifting, disturbing and beautiful-- that beg reflection, repair, and restoration as well as those that uplift and inspire. By strategically engaging with a wide range of Baltimoreans, our hope is that we'll courageously raise up aspects of our city's history and culture that have been marginalized or stigmatized, and integrate and elevate these in relationship with better-known stories and symbols. As we discuss in "Research and Institutions Matter", the reimagining process should also include people who typically have a strong voice in major public initiatives -- leaders of major institutions, subject-matter experts, and creators of similar initiatives in other cities. Our goals are to bring truth and reconciliation to rethinking this key public space, to directly address the omissions and oppressions of the past, and to create a place where all are welcome.

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## CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS FROM OUR READERS:

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*“It would be nice to see the main function of the Inner Harbor initiative, initially, be about bringing people together in organized ways to imagine ways to improve life in the city. The right kinds of gatherings, with arts, food, and town halls/breakout sessions would be superb.”*

*“..Organize.. Organize.. Reach out to all of the Communities in the City.. and Developers who have a Diverse Team of Visionaries and Funding Partners.. (Neutral Political).. with a track record with seamless development in communities with WATER, as an amenity, mixed income and multi/racial residents.”*

*“‘Harbor Stories.’ Encourage all residents to write their stories and memories from the harbor - good and bad - to show discrepancies in how we have all experienced the harbor and provide an honest accounting of its story, told by its residents.”*

*“So often gentrification is possible because community input from low income people is obsolete in the process of “re-imagining” places. But if this is done differently, the Inner Harbor could be a community where everyone feels safe, has a space, and feels welcome. The idea of public ownership can be given to all if we make sure to prioritize BIPOC and poor people and their voices.”*

*“Form and fund a public Re-imagining -- the Inner Harbor Working Group - that is representative of the City (regions, backgrounds, ages, etc.) and begin a listening campaign in various parts of the city. Establish a Truth and Reconciliation process grounded in Restorative Practices that teaches and values deep listening and seeks ways to lift up our stories, face our history, and repair our social divisions and inequities.”*

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## PROGRAMMING MATTERS

*"I remember before Harborplace was built my parents would take me down there for some neighborhood and ethnic festivals and park for free on the dirt and grass and along the streets, at least that was possible on the weekends. We would spend all day there on what is now Rash Field with food stalls and bands playing and people singing and dancing. As a teenager I remember staffing the first gay booth at the citywide festival along Light Street." (Reader response)*

### KEY THEMES

- **Envision robust activities:** Build places for mixed use, interaction, and experiences
- **Engage people:** Feature local talent in leadership roles, respond to local interests and needs
- **Balance public and private roles and representation:** Value and engage benefits well beyond profit models and traditional sectors

The public spaces in the Harbor come to life when we interact with people and experience places directly -- learning, listening, or dancing together, marvelling at a musical performance or sculptures crafted out of light, or simply watching children laugh or run or splash in a fountain. In the film [Dark City Beneath the Beat](#), which explores Baltimore's dynamic club music scene, we see orange-clad members of the cast perform a tightly choreographed dance in front of the USS Constellation, a historic ship floating in the Harbor. As the lead dancer raps about his city, Baltimore residents watching the film experience a familiar scene in a new, unexpected, powerful way. It jolts viewers and brings the Harbor to life.

This scene hints at powerful possibilities.

Jane Jacobs argued in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* that urban areas thrive when they facilitate positive organic connections among residents. Beneath the apparent chaos of busy sidewalks, there's a dance of surprising complexity. Programming for the Harbor should highlight local talent and create the kind of spontaneous person-to-person connections that we are looking for, as we recover from pandemic-induced isolation, and seek ways to bridge the many divisions within our city. This programming can and should take many forms -- large-scale public events, small-scale

performances, nonprofit social enterprises, community-led workshops, formal experiential education, self-guided learning, perhaps even water ballet if and when the Harbor water becomes swimmable again!

One starting place would be to follow the lead of other cities in [periodically closing stretches of downtown thoroughfares to cars](#) -- for example, modeling Mexico City, Bogota, and other international cities long-running successes, Baltimore could launch Car-Free Summer Sundays connecting the Harbor's Pratt St around to the vibrant JFX Market and opening that stretch of wide avenues up to all kinds

of other people-friendly uses. Like the Baltimore City Fairs of the 70s, what might emerge from a series of car-free downtown festival days? Philadelphia's [Rail Park](#) and New York's [High Line](#) are regional examples of a creative people-centered downtown greenways. The existing free Circulator bus system will also be an important infrastructure to enhance and engage in creating higher accessibility and extending the downtown out from the Harbor Hub to our diverse neighborhoods and their attractions. What might we learn and what energies and ideas might we unleash by mixing free transit and car-free streets to open up the downtown for people?

## OUR READERS SHARE THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMMING IDEAS:



*"I'd like to be able to see/visualize all the different ways the harbor has looked...from geological past, to pre-contact native peoples, to the various Baltimore versions. I'd also like to have a visitors center with storytellers and interactive multimedia spaces that pique your interest about the city's history, communities, and people, and then send you out exploring other parts of the city."*

*"Racially diverse activities and events along harbor, from all of the different communities similar to what Out of the Blocks shares on their podcasts."*

*"I think that the Baltimore bike life is something that has always been a part of our culture. Dirt bikes and pedal bikes you are going to see them all across the city whenever it's warm outside and yes as much as we hate them we love them too. I think maybe a mural of them downtown would be super cool to add and incorporate a part of our culture downtown."*

*"More accessible spaces. Create spaces where people can spend their time without spending money -- like lounges you find in college dorms. Create activities that people can do that will benefit them and also be free! Free museums, a free book trade, a free show once a week. Baltimore Ceasefire space, Dew More Poetry space, organizations from Baltimore that aren't focused on profit. Anything that draws people to the harbor even if they can't spend. This will generate a sense of community, and distribute a safe place to go for kids, and support for underprivileged people. And it is realistic. If we want it to be. Divest from the millions of dollars we spend on policing. Give us a crumb. Give us one of those millions."*

*"Have a code of conduct and stick to it."*

*"What about a playground where the structures are structures of Baltimore? The shot tower becomes a slide. The Constellation becomes a climbing gym. Crabs and Oysters become seats to sit on and dig in a sand pit. Hutzler's becomes an area where kids can play store. There's a Hippodrome stage for children to create 'plays'. Memorial Stadium houses bean bag tosses, hopscotch or spinning Tic Tac Toe boards."*

*"There should be nonstop shuttle loops between the Inner Harbor, the Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts & Entertainment district, and the city's markets."*

*"I think adding some sort of rec space, maybe a basketball court would be super cool kind of near where the fountain water parkish area is downtown. Something that can be used by everyone and attracts some more attention to downtown and draws something. Also there is this colosseum looking thing in the middle of downtown right in the middle of the two pavilion buildings. Add something here that is going to make it more attractive. It looks ugly. It is plain concrete and bland and ugly. Give us some 'swag'."*



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For one of our readers, safety in the presence of “closed shops” and people perceived to be “vagrants and panhandlers” is a major concern. A different reader finds the police presence a barrier to feeling safe at the Harbor: “For a place [to be] where all people feel safe, especially Black people, the police need to leave.” We believe that creative, community-led safety solutions exist as alternatives to heavy policing models, and a central component will involve engaging Baltimore’s young people of color in developing and implementing ways to achieve greater safety around the Harbor. This is not a new idea. The Inner Harbor Project (IHP), which ran from 2012 to 2017, was a youth-led nonprofit that worked to transform the Inner Harbor from a place of

escalating conflict to a safer and more inclusive public space. [As documented in an extensive report by Celia Neustadt](#), IHP founder and executive director, IHP decreased youth violence, arrests, and negative stereotypes of Black teens by: (1) empowering youth as agents of change; (2) adopting youth participatory action research, and; (3) recognizing public spaces as arenas of change. As we engage young people in reimagining the Harbor, it makes sense to explore with them the potential for renewing this approach. There is a double-win opportunity with safety and oversight programming that engages groups who’ve felt historically excluded, not only in visiting the harbor, but as leaders invested in its success.

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## RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONS MATTER

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*“You suggested the creation of a working group of diverse city stakeholders. This working group could include experts on the technical and financial aspects. Experts in urban planning and law, experts in public infrastructure financing, etc. They could provide advice to community representatives as they discuss ideas. There are equitable ways of matching technical experts and community members...As you continue to develop this effort, I suggest highlighting institutions in and around the Inner Harbor that already embody the vision you presented, such as the Reginald Lewis Museum, the Baltimore Museum of Immigration, the American Visionary Art Museum, and the Baltimore Museum of Industry.” (Reader response)*

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## KEY THEMES

- **Find out who is doing this well:** Explore and consult with cities facing core downtown and identity challenges with creativity, vision, and courage.
- **Choose models with intention:** Consider the frames that guide both our process and product. Do they center people? Does Baltimore have a clear vision, mission, and values statement to guide development?
- **Engage and leverage existing institutions:** We have much in place and underway already to interconnect and strengthen.
- **Envision and pursue new institutions:** Take the opportunity to fill gaps and add value.

Much of what we have written thus far emphasizes the importance -- the necessity -- of engaging often-marginalized Baltimore residents and communities in the process of reinventing the Harbor, and weaving their history, culture, frustrations and hopes into the planning and development of what comes next. At the same time, we need to learn from people and organizations with expertise that will be essential in this process -- local nonprofit, government and private-sector leaders, as well as creators of successful, community-oriented waterfront developments in other major cities. Around the country, two compelling examples that a reader advised us to contact are the [Detroit River Conservancy](#) and the [Memphis River Parks Partnership](#).

In 2020 Baltimore voters elected a new Mayor, a new President of City Council as well as new City Council Members, and a new Comptroller. These leaders have an opportunity, even an obligation, to call for the creation of a more inclusive, vibrant and sustainable

central public space for residents. Baltimore also has an array of community and economic development nonprofits and social-mission for-profits that could help connect the Harbor to their neighborhoods. As we mentioned in the introduction above, there are many museums and attractions in and around the Inner Harbor that would benefit from, and should be engaged in, the Harbor's next incarnation. This hub model would not only increase their own institutions visibility and use, but begin to weave a larger collective story from their component parts.

We also can learn from the Harbor's own past: the strengths and flaws of what was once considered a national, even international, model for waterfront redevelopment. What lessons can we take from this placemaking effort which drew millions of people and dollars downtown, while simultaneously leaving other neighborhoods -- places with a majority of Black residents -- to



continue suffering massive disinvestment and depopulation. One reader mentioned that the original Harborplace reserved space for products that would appeal primarily to local residents, and that these uses were driven out by the higher rents that tourist-oriented chain businesses were willing to pay.

Baltimore is bursting with young social entrepreneurs looking for opportunities to market their goods and services. Can the Harbor become a place that attracts, supports and retains their enterprises? The numerous local vendors currently supporting the [JFX Farmers Market](#), the [Made In Baltimore marketplace](#), and other locally sourced venues would be important resources. Access

is a longstanding issue. The current Harbor area is surrounded on the North, South, and West by extremely wide streets designed primarily for cars. These streets effectively cut off the space from the surrounding city. Recent design initiatives following [“complete streets”](#) modeling for the similar longstanding access challenge faced around [Druid Hill Park](#) are producing exciting plans to restore accessibility and safety. They equally value pedestrian, bike, and other forms of traffic. Advocating for complete-street redesigns around the Harbor and in key affected areas around the City can work in unison to support a City that prioritizes people having access to its most unique spaces and resources.

## OUR READERS CONTRIBUTE THEIR THOUGHTS:



*“The Inner Harbor was fundamentally a hub that drew Baltimoreans and people from surrounding counties, not an expensive playground for tourists. The Inner Harbor brought our communities together and created a sense of community pride: the Science Center, the Aquarium, The Constellation, the Torsk, the paddle boats, the Tall Ships, the restaurants, the street performers, the fountains, the City Fair, the ethnic festivals, the water taxi, the Fourth of July fireworks, the New Years fireworks, the Christmas Village, the base for numerous 5Ks and 10Ks, the volley ball games, the ice skating...Yes, tourists came, too. The Inner Harbor was a great success, nationally recognized, and it drew people. It was also a vibrant economic machine helping to sustain a city that had lost so much of its industry and population. With sound leadership, the Inner Harbor can return to the great venue it has been for everyone...with resonating positive economic benefits for the local economy and tax benefits for the city.”*

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*“For a while Harborplace was the model cities around the world tried to emulate; now we need to find OTHER cities around the world that have taken an approach that fits with your vision, so it would be really helpful to track some of them down for ideas.”*

*“Few people remember that much of the space at the original Harborplace was reserved for meats and vegetables and other items for locals, not just tourists and that Harborplace featured local merchants with diverse themes, some of whom were minority entrepreneurs. The residential neighborhoods around the harbor continue to thrive and downtown itself has added a lot of new residents since the late 1970s when Harborplace was first built. If the project is to be financially restructured it may be possible to reintroduce products and focus on locals and small incubator space for local merchants as it did early on. I believe these uses were driven out by the higher rents that tourist oriented chain businesses were willing to pay.”*

*“I encourage you to borrow from the Reimagining Civic Commons work. Also, wonderful leaders like Mark Wallace at the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and Carol Coletta at the Memphis River Parks Partnership would be terrific and would have valuable insight and lessons.”*

*“Develop the idea of the Inner Harbor as a problem solving space. A town hall; a piazza...where we take a creative and joyful approach to rethinking otherwise inequitable and often dysfunctional systems, from Baltimore's business models, to our education, healthcare, policing, transportation, city branding and identity.”*



## MONEY MATTERS

*"Two weeks ago we found ourselves in Myrtle Beach in the State Park Campground and, having both completed our vaccine regimen, thought we'd try an outdoor dining venue... for the first time in over a year. Less than two miles away was "Market Common" which the area campers highly recommended. Well, we did in fact find outdoor seating at an Italian restaurant...I was marveling at what I called the "faux city" which we found ourselves in. Not unlike Baltimore's Inner Harbor, White Marsh' Avenue, Cleveland's Inner Harbor or Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston... if you were kidnapped and woke in any of the aforementioned, you might be at a loss as to where you actually were... why not let cities evolve from the real thing, be real, develop their own charm and character instead of pretending w/ all of this make believe stuff." (Reader response)*

### KEY THEMES

- **Development with intentionality:** Preserving what is valuable in traditional models, while boldly pursuing new models and metaphors of development
- **Engage diverse economies:** Think broadly and creatively about our investments and returns
- **Build resources and funding:** Match our vision with robust funding strategies
- **Cultivate partnerships:** Connect across sectors and scales and missions to create many and diverse stakeholders

As residents, community-based organizations, local leaders, and subject-matter experts participate in the rethinking and redesign of the Harbor, we need to explore how the money flows (or fails to flow) now, and how to create a more equitable, sustainable model of development going forward. It will require significant funding up front -- which

could come from a public-private partnership, involving the City, corporations, and philanthropic foundations and individuals -- to undertake an inclusive and effective planning process. Federal dollars potentially could support this investment in Baltimore's civic and physical infrastructure.

While the original Harborplace had more locally-oriented shops and products, for many years the pavilions have featured national chain shops and restaurants. This business model sacrifices authentic local culture and flavor for the familiarity of the usual suspects, who import a geography of nowhere exactly where a phenomenal opportunity for capitalizing on the presence of real places and people is located. These enterprises also typically provide low-wage jobs for residents and tax revenues for the city, while the profits leave the area. Since our March 17, 2021 opinion piece, the [September 22 announcement of The Gallery mall closing](#) confirms our suspicions of a broader downtown decline and makes bold reconception all the more urgent. Currently one social enterprise at the Harbor, Flying Fruit Fruitshakes, provides on-the-job training to local young people and pays them a salary. We need more of these double-bottom-line businesses that achieve positive economic as well as social impacts. Fortunately Baltimore is

becoming a hotbed of more equitable ways of doing business, with training programs and foundations supporting nonprofit and for-profit social entrepreneurs, and a growing number of cooperative networks and enterprises. How can we connect this talent to the new Harbor?

The city also produces remarkable visual and performing artists that are notably absent from current Harbor programming. National musical acts play the Pier Six Concert Pavilion, Power Plant Live, and Ram's Head Live, but there are few opportunities for local acts in both formal and improvised performance settings. With new resources and outreach, people would come downtown to watch buskers perform throughout the Harbor, and to experience the work of painters, sculptors, and multimedia artists rotating through galleries and public art installations. The [sculpture garden in downtown Des Moines](#) provides one vibrant example that could be tailored to engage our own local talent.

## OUR READERS CONTRIBUTE THEIR PERSPECTIVES ON POTENTIAL CHANGES TO THE HARBOR'S ECONOMY:



*"Reach out to philanthropic, local, state and federal governments to buy in. Our senators and reps, local and national, can play a critical role."*

*"Corporate entities that benefit from being located here will be a good source, among others. It's not enough to say that jobs are being provided, but also an investment into the community is needed I believe."*

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*"So the act of imagining and building social capital...is also an economic market. Focusing on one and not the other keeps us where we are now."*

*"Themed restaurants featuring different time-periods or cultural traditions would provide an experience and not just food -- like Medieval Times or Rainforest Cafe, but with actual local significance. Artworks created for public spaces could be auctioned off to benefit different neighborhoods."*

*"The more local talent we can showcase the better - giving artists a way of support. Locally run businesses and contractors make sense as well. Could there be volunteer labor in exchange for a share of the profits?... Instead of all the eateries being fancy restaurants or national chains, how about local food trucks parked near the picnic area, or locally run snack stands positioned around the area like you encounter around the zoo. Regulations can be met, but the snack stands could be run and managed by residents, thus creating a small business opportunity, perhaps through a partnership with universities or other programs in Baltimore, but the business would be owned by the resident. If the local craft style marketplace became a reality, might we look for partners able to extend microloans to residents wanting to create and sell their wares."*

*"For its resurgence to be successful, it must be a vibrant commercial district bringing Baltimoreans and tourists alike together for enjoyable, educational, and transformational encounters with one another through food, arts, and entertainment."*

*"A dimension of this, something being formed in the greater Penn-North communities, is the idea of cultural development as the foundation of economic and other development, by identifying and lifting up shared aesthetics and community values."*



## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

As these diverse “Matters” attest, there is tremendous potential for a Harbor hub that builds upon today’s existing assets and extends a bold vision of belonging and benefit to all Baltimoreans as well as myriad visitors for decades to come. We cannot allow our current challenges and preoccupations, significant as they are, to reduce this Harbor moment to a transactional rehabilitation of a couple of fading structures. Those same challenges highlight the generational opportunity lying dormant at our City center. Our vision for the Harbor in this pivotal moment deserves a robust, resourced, and inclusive process that recognizes its real and symbolic impact on our City as a whole.

As the City prepares to name a new developer for the Inner Harbor, this is the right time for Mayor Scott to appoint a time-limited and results-oriented “Reimagining Baltimore Harbor” Task Group. The group should be:

- Staffed by facilitators who have experience working with diverse groups.
- Funded jointly by public and private sources, because both sectors will benefit from the process.
- Representative of diverse Baltimore communities and relevant subject-matter expertise, while remaining small (<15) and locally sourced.

- Guided by three exploratory questions:
  - What local assets, strengths, strategies, expertise, institutions, and networks can we learn from, build upon, and engage in bringing Baltimore together to source the development of its own future?
  - What bold, innovative, and successful external examples and strategies (regional, national, and international) can we learn from and evaluate through our uniquely Baltimore lens?
  - What funding models and economic systems are best suited for Baltimore, and what concrete resource opportunities should be prioritized and pursued?

The Task Group’s work would culminate in a report outlining a structure and timeline for an inclusive public planning process, and a prioritized set of recommendations for a reimagined Baltimore Harbor. The report should be in compelling (multimodal) formats for easy and inclusive access and the primary audience for this report should be the citizens of Baltimore. Priorities and recommendations from the report should then provide the substance for a period of open public interaction and comment, especially calling in the many local assets and leaders identified during the Task Group’s process.

Let's start that process now! What is the Baltimore we would be proud to call our home? Let that simple overarching question, and the full and dynamic conversations that it evokes, guide our reimagination of the Harbor.

We invite and look forward to your responses and a growing public discussion of ideas.

December 17, 2021

**Sally Scott**

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Baltimore Resident  
Director, UMBC Shriver Peacemaker  
Program

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