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Media Inquiries only
Michael Evitts
410.528.7719

**MOVING FORWARD ON A NEW DOWNTOWN OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN:
*Mahan Rykiel Associates selected for Public Space Plan***

Downtown Partnership of Baltimore has awarded a contract to create a Downtown Open Space Master Plan to the Baltimore landscape architecture, planning, and urban design firm, Mahan Rykiel Associates, Inc.

Working in conjunction with the Baltimore Department of Planning and the Baltimore Development Corporation, Downtown Partnership has commissioned the Downtown Open Space Master Plan to preserve and enhance existing parks and green spaces, recommend new open space opportunities, and identify ways to unify these spaces into a more comprehensive and interconnected open space network.

“Public spaces define cities and are critical to attracting residents and economic investment,” said Downtown Partnership of Baltimore President Kirby Fowler. “Working closely with the City, we have commissioned Mahan Rykiel to create the framework that will lead to more dynamic parks and pedestrian environments.”

This Open Space Master Plan is part of a larger strategic planning process being conducted by Downtown Partnership to shape future development priorities in the economic and cultural heart of Greater Baltimore. In the past two decades, Downtown Baltimore has been rapidly evolving from a nine-to-five business and tourist district into a more dynamic community of neighborhoods with fast-growing residential, student, and retail components.

“Mahan Rykiel was integral to the transformation of Center Plaza and has a solid understanding of how open space design can shape the urban experience,” said Downtown Partnership Vice President of Economic Development and Planning, Nan Rohrer.

“Downtown Baltimore is growing with new businesses, housing, and tourist attractions every year, and a Master Plan will ensure our open space is maximized to help it become even more vibrant and beautiful as it grows,” said Mayor Rawlings-Blake.

“Historically, open space has been a significant factor in developing Downtown Baltimore and it continues to be an important factor today” said Director of Baltimore City Department of Planning Thomas Stosur. “Given the current need to enhance pedestrian connections between the Downtown and the Inner Harbor – this Master Plan could not come at a better time.”

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Tom McGilloway, who will be managing the project for Mahan Rykiel, said, “We are excited to have been selected for this effort. As Downtown continues to evolve as a vibrant neighborhood, it will be increasingly important to expand the open space Downtown and enhance the network of spaces that currently exists. But creating open space for the sake of having more open space isn’t the goal. This plan will need to focus on how public spaces can be located in a way that they generate activity, leverage new investment, and add value to the Downtown community.”

The current boundaries of Downtown Baltimore included in the plan are Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard on the west, President Street/Jones Falls Expressway on the east, Centre Street on the north and Pratt/Conway Streets. Included in this area are about 125 blocks of the historic heart of Baltimore.

Increasing the amount of Downtown open spaces and enhancing connections between them is a key initiative of Downtown Partnership. Recent and current open space improvements spearheaded by the organization include Center Plaza (recognized with a 2009 Merit Award for architectural excellence from the American Society of Landscape Architects), the ongoing Pratt Street Initiative, and the continued efforts of Downtown Partnership’s Green Team responsible for maintaining, creating, and planting pockets of green throughout Downtown.

Mahan Rykiel will work under the direction of Downtown Partnership with participation from the Baltimore City Department of Planning, the Baltimore Development Corporation, and public and private sector stakeholders.

As part of Mahan Rykiel’s team, the national non-profit, Project for Public Spaces, will assist in conducting initial stakeholder workshops upon which the open space plan will be developed. Sabra Wang & Associates Inc. will coordinate on integrating transportation elements into the plan (such as bicycle, pedestrian, and traffic elements). Flanigan Consulting Inc. will advise on environmental issues and sustainable practices.

Downtown Partnership of Baltimore is a non-profit corporation creating a more vibrant Downtown community for businesses, property owners, residents, and employees. Downtown Partnership initiatives increase investment, retain business, solve transportation challenges, improve parks and greenspace, and create workforce development opportunities. For more than 25 years, these programs have been good for Downtown and good for Baltimore. Visit www.GoDowntownBaltimore.com to learn more.

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