



DOWNTOWN BALTIMORE
OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

2011

GoDowntownBaltimore.com



DOWNTOWN
PARTNERSHIP

When people think about what makes a successful city, they often think about the buildings that comprise the skyline, but most don't realize that cities are just as defined by the open spaces between the buildings.

Around the globe, the best communities have well-designed streetscapes, parks and plazas that bring people outside and invite interaction. Studies show that these kinds of spaces have direct economic benefit by fostering commerce, making it easier to attract tenants, employees, residents and customers, by allowing buildings to charge higher rents and by stimulating additional tax revenue for the city.

Much of Downtown Baltimore is well-served by open space, but its best parks, such as Center Plaza, can feel disconnected from each other, and from the surrounding streets. There are also older areas, particularly on the West Side, that lack parks and well-maintained streetscapes.

To address both the opportunities and challenges presented by open spaces in Downtown Baltimore, Downtown Partnership of Baltimore initiated an Open Space Planning process in conjunction with the Baltimore City Department of Planning and Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC).

Thanks to funding provided by the Baltimore Department of Planning, The Partnership hired Mahan Rykiel Associates and its team, including Project for Public Spaces (PPS), Flannigan Consulting and Sabra Wang & Associates, to complete the study. The team focused its attention on an area bordered by Pratt Street to the south, Centre Street to the north, the Jones Falls Expressway to the east and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to the west.

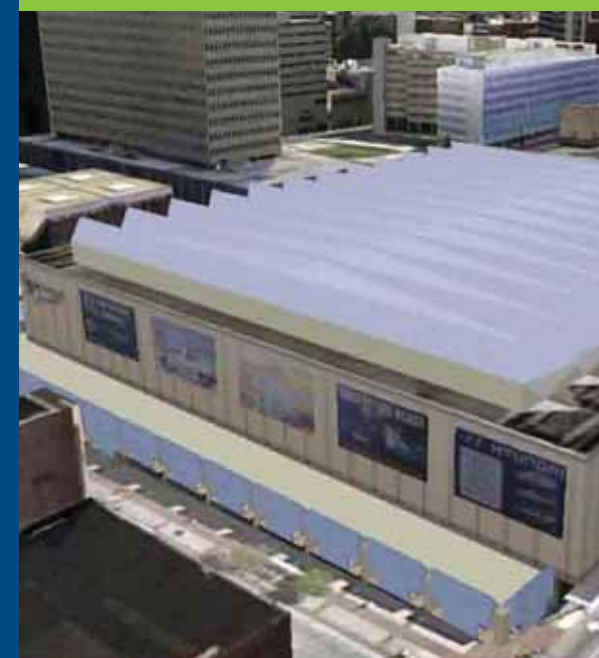
The resulting Open Space Plan for Downtown Baltimore is summarized in these pages. It was designed as a companion to a larger Strategic Plan for Downtown Baltimore that Downtown Partnership will release in the Spring of 2011.

The full plan may be downloaded from GoDowntownBaltimore.com.



Arena Site

While the site of a new arena is still in question, there was little doubt among participants in open space charrettes about creating a dramatic park on the current location. The existing building, below, would be completely removed. Above is one of several possible concepts for the cleared site. Because it sits adjacent to Hopkins Plaza and is surrounded by residences, offices, and hotels, this location could potentially become to Downtown what Millennium Park is to Chicago, albeit on a smaller scale.



Current condition.



Hopkins Plaza

The above rendering shows how Hopkins Plaza could look if the existing building at the west end of the space was removed, better connecting the plaza to the street and to whatever happens on the current site of the arena. On the east end, the planned redevelopment of the former Mechanic Theatre into a mixed-use project will attract people at all hours of the day and night.

Current condition.



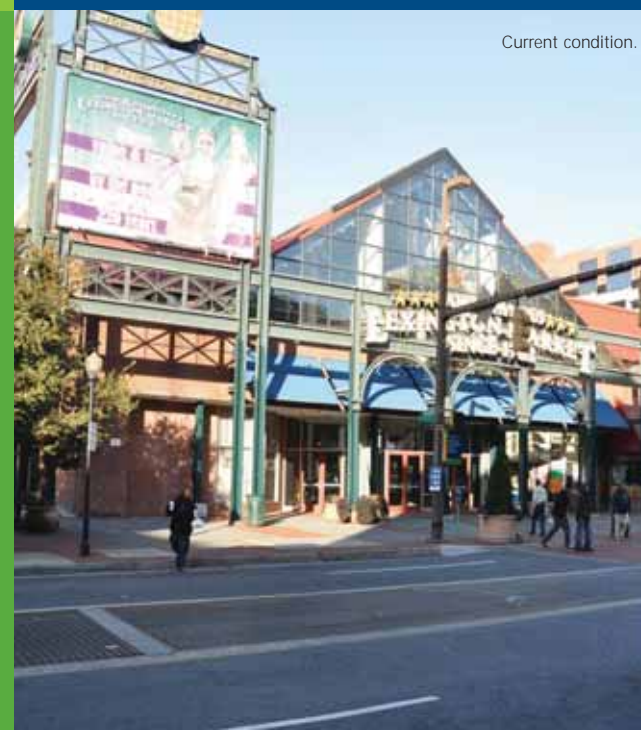


Lexington Market

While one of the most dynamic retail destinations in Baltimore, the area around Lexington Market has great potential for improvement, and could become an even greater focal point of Westside activity. The above concept has replaced the market's west building with at-grade parks and food kiosks. The rendering at right shows what could happen if the market's atrium was opened up to create a pedestrian space with food stalls on the perimeter.



Current condition.



Current condition.



Open Space Plan: What's Next?

The Open Space Plan for Downtown Baltimore outlines a broad range of recommendations for improving existing areas, creating new open space, and using green corridors to connect parks and plazas. The Plan's recommendations are based on community workshops, innovative online mapping tools and input from hundreds of Downtown Baltimore stakeholders. Some recommendations are general while others are very specific but they are all informed by international experts on urban planning.

The full plan, available for download from GoDowntownBaltimore.com, will augment the forthcoming Strategic Plan for Downtown Baltimore. Together, they will shape the way Downtown Baltimore looks and functions over the next decade and beyond.

Newer Downtown neighborhoods, such as Harbor East, show the benefit of having high quality public space and how the streetscape can seamlessly interact with the built environment. Older Downtown neighborhoods may lack waterfront views and are more complicated to redevelop, but they have unique architecture and a distinct character that can be greatly enhanced by the recommendations in the Plan.

Downtown Partnership, with its partners within government and the private sector, is already working to bring this plan's recommendations into being. Progress in Preston Gardens, along Pratt Street, and in small parks throughout Downtown, is already being made. The Partnership is also taking steps to secure funding and other incentives that will be needed to move many of the Open Space plan recommendations forward.



Current condition.



One Light Street

There are several surface parking lots in Downtown. From the standpoint of both parking efficiency and urban design, these lots are an undesirable use. The images on these pages use the property at One Light Street to show how surface parking could be repurposed. These designs includes a new mid-rise structure with a lawn, perimeter landscaping, and outdoor dining.

Current condition.





Current condition.



Preston Gardens

A redesigned Preston Gardens will draw people into this unique space and address structural issues related to the restraining wall that separates the lower portion of the park with Upper Saint Paul Street. Landscaping is improved, fountains are reactivated, and a new surface is added for outdoor dining. The biggest recommendation is to eliminate the parking and

shift the northbound lane of traffic along Upper Saint Paul. This creates a western edge for the space and, by moving cars farther away from the wall, alleviates pressure that is causing the wall to shift.

Current condition.



Current condition.





Downtown's Open Spaces

The purpose of the Open Space Plan is to increase the amount of open space in Downtown and link them into a comprehensive network. Downtown Partnership wants not just to create great open spaces, it wants to use open space improvements to support economic development goals and more seamlessly connect Downtown areas that are doing well to those that need additional investment.

To accomplish this goal, the Open Space Plan is grounded in four guiding concepts around which specific recommendations are based. These concepts are: Networks, Sustainability, Transportation, and Placemaking.

NETWORKS

Having lots of individual parks is a good thing. Having them connected via greenways and well-designed streetscapes is even better. The Open Space Plan calls for creating gateways into Downtown and better connecting the districts within Downtown. These networks should help "pull" pedestrians from one area to another.

Unfortunately, much of Downtown's public space was originally designed to accommodate automobile usage. Transportation planning must be viewed within the larger context of creating desirable communities, not just in terms of moving people and goods from place to place. Fortunately, as has been shown in many other cities, properly designed and activated streets and transit stops can become destinations in their own right.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Open Space Plan includes multiple goals related to sustainability and environmental quality. Where possible, it incorporates existing public space improvement strategies such as Downtown Partnership's Pratt Street Master Plan, tree canopy goals set by the Baltimore Department of Recreation and Parks, stormwater mitigation, and multiple environmental and quality of life goals described in the City's Sustainability Plan.

PLACEMAKING
Thriving civic spaces create a strong sense of community and express each neighborhood's distinct identity. Successful public spaces attract people and are characterized by four key attributes: Access & Linkages, Comfort & Image, Uses & Activities, and Sociability.

TRANSPORTATION

Downtown Baltimore is the most transit-rich jurisdiction in Central Maryland. This transit access combines with Downtown's overall walkability to create successful and desirable communities from both a commercial and residential standpoint.

Jones Falls Park

The area around the Hollywood Diner is currently used for a popular farmers market on the weekend, and for parking during the week. Redesign of this space would move the diner to a corner of the lot, thus creating more usable space for public gathering. Street trees, improved sidewalk materials, and landscaping would turn a utilitarian area in the shadow of the elevated Jones Falls Expressway into a lush destination.



Current condition.

Open Space Plan: General Recommendations

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

- Utilize best management practices for Downtown street tree plantings
- Capture urban stormwater runoff at or near the source using a variety of techniques
- Utilize recycled materials in the construction/renovation of new spaces
- Utilize signage, display panels and public art to provide interpretation and education of sustainable practices
- Consider use of solar structures to generate power for water features and lighting within spaces
- Explore creative ways to incorporate urban agriculture into open spaces where possible

TRANSPORTATION/MODE-SHARING

- Accommodate bicyclists in all spaces and consider both short and long-term bike parking
- Continue exploring options to convert Downtown non-arterials to two-way traffic flow to improve pedestrian environment and circulation options for motorists

RED LINE AND METRO STATION AREAS

- Give stations a strong presence, making them a center point for the neighborhood; balance aesthetics with function
- Capture the unique identity of each station area
- Give equal design consideration to pedestrian routes to and from a station
- Maintain direct sight lines to stations and accommodate direct pedestrian access

STREETSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS

- Apply "road diets" wherever possible
- Utilize "shared space" where it is important to maintain vehicular traffic but emphasize the pedestrian environment

- Follow the Downtown Baltimore Streetscape Design Guidelines
- Explore creative ways of introducing scale, shade and color where street trees are not possible

TEMPORARY ENHANCEMENTS

- Utilize pavement striping as a way to experiment with changes in street configurations before investing in permanent solutions
- Utilize pots and planters that can be moved to different locations
- Utilize "pop-up-cafes" where sidewalks are too narrow for outdoor dining

PUBLIC ART

- Work with artists and others within the design community to develop solutions for blank walls
- Rotate art within spaces to keep the space fresh and give people additional reasons to return

AVAILABILITY OF REFRESHMENTS

- Explore the concept of consolidated and managed vending operations within Downtown
- Locate restaurant and dining establishments where they will help activate open spaces
- Work with building owners to allow moveable chairs and tables to activate the area around their properties

PARTNERSHIPS

- Continue to nurture partnerships with property owners, Downtown institutions and foundations
- Continue to build a residential base of stakeholders



Pratt Street

Downtown Partnership released a redesign plan for Pratt Street in 2008 and, already, progress is being made, particularly with the removal of earthen berms, the placement of new trees and public art, and the addition of street-level dining. All the recommendations of the earlier Pratt Street Redesign are incorporated into this master plan. These images show how removal of a skywalk and berm open up the sidewalk at 400 East Pratt Street, which is brought to life with new landscaping and the addition of retail space.



Current condition.



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Mahan Rykiel Associates led the design team that included the Project for Public Spaces, Flannigan Consulting, and Sabra Wang & Associates.



THE NEWLY RENOVATED CENTER PLAZA



BALTIMORE
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



MAHAN RYKIEL
ASSOCIATES, INC.
Landscape Architecture
Urban Design, Planning