

# Baltimore City's Department of Planning

Introducing a New Zoning Code! (But wait, there's more!)

## LAI Baltimore Chapter – March, 2017 meeting

Tom Stosur, Director of Baltimore City's Dept. of Planning, provided a cogent overview of the goals, activities, and history of the Department during the Baltimore LAI Chapter's March, 2017 luncheon. The BIG news is the City's newly adopted comprehensive Zoning Code, which will take effect on June 5<sup>th</sup> of this year. But before Tom delved into the copious details of this headline story, he provided our LAI members & guests with an overview of the Dept. of Planning and its impact on our City.

The Dept. employs approx. 50 planners, who are divided into three major endeavors, as follows:

- Planning Commission, which reviews all subdivision & PUD applications; develops & manages the Comprehensive Plan; and plans for the overall physical development of the City. This division of the Dept. was established in 1947.
- Commission for the Historical & Architectural Preservation (CHAP). CHAP designates City Landmarks and Historic Districts, reviewing any plans that would affect designated structures, and attempts to foster the preservation of the City's historic assets. Established in 1964.
- Sustainability Commission, which developed and monitors the City's Sustainability Plan; reports on any sustainability initiatives; and advises the City's leaders on relevant issues and legislation. Established in 2007.

While acknowledging that the City's population loss, crime issues and school quality are ongoing issues to be wrestled with, Tom was pleased to report that since 2010, 20,000+ new residential units are either complete or under construction. A remarkable, secular shift for the City. In addition, job growth within the City has expanded nicely during this same timeframe. Tom advised that the "makeup of the City's population is changing in a positive way". Income taxes are increasing due to higher income families moving into the City. How to continue this progress? Or as Tom put it, "how do we change the dynamic in challenged neighborhoods?" This was his clever segue into a discussion of the City's new Zoning Code.

The existing Zoning Code has been on the books since 1971 (back when Michael Jackson's 12 year old face graced the cover of Rolling Stone Magazine and Richard Nixon was President). Back then, the focus was on auto-oriented development, keeping real estate uses separated, and preserving the City's substantial manufacturing base. The current Zoning Code is so old, that uses have come into existence and become obsolete during its tenure – think video stores. So how does a City go about replacing such an anachronistic Zoning Code? Apparently it requires an army of planners, consultants, working groups, advisory committees, City-wide meetings, and more City-wide meetings. Plus a lot of time. Baltimore's process began back in 2007 and was finally voted into law on December 5, 2016 (apparently the last possible day the City Council had to pass the legislation, or the process would have had to start all over again, from scratch).

Tom advised that the new Code (known as "Transform Baltimore") has:

- More mixed use categories and flexible commercial zones (MU, TOD, OIC & BSC).
- Broad categories that allow the Code to stay relevant.
- Commercial Districts & Neighborhood Commercial conditional uses.
- More flexible ground floor commercial uses in high density residential zones.
- New Overlay Zones (i.e. Educational Campus zone, Hospital zones, Waterfront zones) that replace antiquated residential zoning.

The new Code's Use Tables have purposely shifted to largely mixed use. And the Code now contains a Design & Landscape manual to be updated periodically by the Planning Commission. The ultimate goal of the new Design & Landscape manual is to "make the City greener".

Having provided an overview of the monumental process and achievement of implementing the new Transform Baltimore zoning law, Tom then moved onto discuss other goals of the Planning Commission, such as reducing the numbers of non-conforming liquor stores, updating the City's Sustainability Plan, and the City's "Inspire" plan to upgrade its school infrastructure.

Tom advised that there are presently about 100 non-conforming liquor stores operating primarily in challenged areas in east & west Baltimore. Based on the new code, about 75 of these liquor outlets will be required to phase-out the sale of alcohol within two years of the effective date of the code (June 5, 2017). Another set of liquor outlets are licensed as "taverns" ostensibly, but generate the majority of their revenue from take-out liquor sales. The new Transform Baltimore zoning code, also requires that a tavern must generate at least 51% of its sales from "on-site" consumption within two years, so stores that masqueraded as taverns but are actually just "take-out" liquor stores will be phased out as well, or subject to zoning enforcement measures.

Another major initiative of the Planning Commission is to update the City's Sustainability Plan – this is currently underway. The Framework and Timeline for the plan's updating are best conveyed by the following slides Tom provided:

## Sustainability Plan: Framework

Human-Made Systems	Climate and Resiliency	Community	Economy	Human Health and Well-being	Nature in the City
Water and Sewer Systems	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Education	Green Market Development	Active Living	Green Infrastructure
Housing	Energy	Good Schools	Local Business	Food and Nutrition	Trees and Forests
Transportation	Natural Hazards	Waste and Recycling	Quality Jobs and Wages	Healthcare and Hospitals	Water in the Environment
Planning Neighborhoods	Community Preparedness	Neighbors	Targeted Industry Development	Air Quality (Indoor and Outdoor)	Biodiversity
Buildings	Emergency Prevention & Response	Arts and Culture	Training and Readiness	Safety	Natural Systems
		Diversity		Poverty Prevention	Urban Farms

## Sustainability Plan: Timeline

APRIL 19, 2016	Annual Town Hall: Launch plan update
AUGUST - DECEMBER	Train ambassadors; Engage residents
SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER	Engage stakeholders
OCTOBER 26, 2016	Community Forum
JANUARY - MAY 2017	Develop draft plan
APRIL - MAY 2017	Final draft plan: Available for public comment
APRIL 18, 2017	Annual Town Hall: Obtain feedback for final document
MAY - JUNE 2017	Present Plan to Planning Commission and City Council
JUNE 2017	Release updated Sustainability Plan

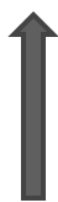


A major emphasis within the updated Sustainability Plan will be Green Network Plan, whose goal will be to “spread green infrastructure across the City”. The Planning Commission has published a pamphlet to promote the Green Network Plan that Tom made available to the LAI attendees. The goals of this Plan are best seen in the following slide:

## Green Network Plan: Opportunities to Expand Green Network

### Selected Goals

#### Increase:

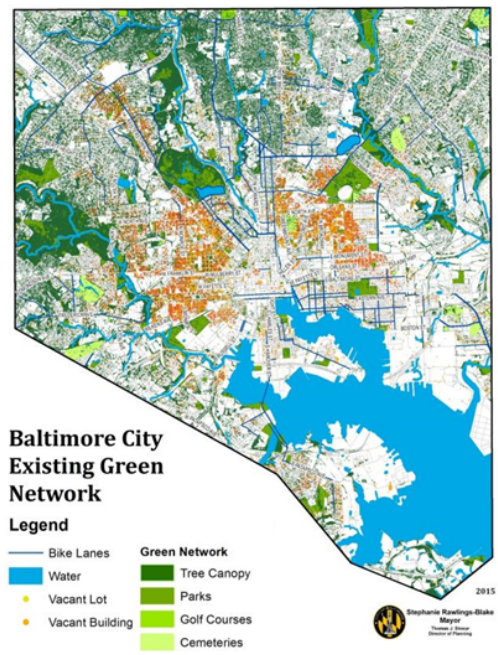


- Quality of Life
- Neighborhood Walkability
- Safety
- Investment and Revitalization
- Green Job Opportunities
- Access to Open Space
- Health Benefits
- Water Quality

#### Reduce:



- Blight and Abandonment
- Crime
- Polluted Runoff
- Flooding
- “Heat Islands”



The Plan’s vision of transforming vacant and abandoned properties into community assets, is exemplified by several “pilot projects to get things moving”, according to Tom. These include the effort to create park-like environments along the Amtrak line running through the City. One goal of the Green Network Plan is to maximize the impact of the State Project CORE funding of \$75M over four years for blight elimination to create more significant permanent and temporary green spaces in these challenged neighborhoods.

Lastly, Tom touched on the City’s “Inspire” initiative to revitalize neighborhoods around City Schools’ “21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools” program. Inspire is a clever acronym derived from “Investing in **N**eighborhoods and **S**chools to **P**romote **I**mprovement, **R**evitalization, and **E**xcellence”. This nearly \$1B 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools initiative will fund 23 to 28 new, ground up or completely renovated, schools within Baltimore City. The City’s goal is to leverage these significant new investments for revitalization of the surrounding neighborhoods. At the same time, Planning is helping to coordinate the re-use of approximately 26 schools slated for closure, whose students will be attending the new schools. Tom opined that “students will be doing much more walking to schools” after the Inspire initiative is completed. The Inspire plan’s goals and strategies are best conveyed in the following slide provided by Tom:

<b>INSPIRE: Goals &amp; Strategies - Examples</b>	
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Strategy Examples</b>
<b>Investing in Housing and Market-Strengthening Development Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and increase homeownership</li> <li>• Remove blight</li> <li>• Create and maintain high-quality rental housing</li> <li>• Promote large-scale and strategic development opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Improving Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove uses that create unsafe environments</li> <li>• Improve lighting</li> <li>• Work with district police</li> </ul>
<b>Improving Sanitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use code enforcement to improve appearance and safety</li> <li>• Develop community-led initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Creating Environmentally-Sustainable Neighborhoods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop neighborhood greening projects</li> <li>• Plant and maintain new street trees</li> <li>• Explore opportunities for schools to become a “Green School”</li> </ul>
<b>Creating Opportunities for Health and Wellness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase use of parks and playgrounds</li> <li>• Enhance the healthy food environment</li> <li>• Improve community cohesion</li> </ul>
<b>Creating Connections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve walking/biking access and safety in neighborhoods</li> <li>• Increase and improve public transportation</li> </ul>
<b>Building Community Partnerships and Strength</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen connections between residents, retail, and community facilities and community-based organizations</li> <li>• Address education/school/family/student needs</li> <li>• Market the neighborhood</li> </ul>

As with every major city, Baltimore has serious challenges ahead. Great to know that with dedicated planners such as Tom Stosur leading the fight, there are thoughtful, focused efforts underway to continue improving our City’s built environment, culture and livability. The LAI board and members thank Tom for his excellent and inspiring presentation.