



Joe Nathanson: Building community

Evan Morville is passionate about his work. That was evident as I and several colleagues recently met with him to learn about the changes that his company, Seawall Development, is bringing to north Baltimore's Remington community. With Morville as our guide, we started our briefing and walking tour in Charmington's, the café located in Seawall's early project, Miller's Court, at the corner of 26th and Howard Streets. The former tin can factory building, dating to 1890, has been renovated to accommodate 40 one-, two- or three-bedroom apartments. The building now serves as the home of a number of new teachers recruited to the Baltimore Public School System. A cadre of small nonprofit organizations occupies the building's first-floor offices.

One might raise the question, "Why Remington?" Remington was a neighborhood largely overlooked as changes were taking place in other parts of Baltimore. Tucked in just south of the Johns Hopkins University's Homeland campus and Wyman Park, Remington is described by Live Baltimore as "an original Baltimore streetcar suburb and is best known as a quirky, relaxed community of old timers, artists, musicians, professionals and students." Having been overlooked by other developers, rents and home prices had remained affordable in this neighborhood relatively close to Baltimore's downtown.

Leaving Miller's Court we began to see other changes, noticing individual rowhouses, updated with small touches by the Seawall team, such as creating one wide second-floor window in place of the existing two small windows. We also learned that some of the people who had been living in Miller's Court for a few years – both singles and couples – had a special request of Seawall. They had been enjoying life in Remington and now wanted to establish roots and become homeowners in the community. Could Seawall provide homes for sale? It had not been part of Seawall's original plan, but now if you were to look at the east side of the 2800 block of Remington Avenue you will see nine Seawall rowhomes, once again with the signature second-story window treatment, occupied by new owners, in homes priced between \$130,000 and \$175,000.

Seawall has been listening to the community in other ways. High on the list of desired changes was the creation of a new "Main Street" along Remington Avenue. The changes, proposed about two years ago, are now underway on the west side of the street, encompassing the 2700, 2800 and 2900 blocks of Remington Avenue. The most dramatic change is now visible in the 2700 block, as a five-story, mixed-use development is rising from the ground. Remington Row, an \$80-million development will have 15,000 square feet of ground-floor retail, a second floor with 30,000 square feet of offices, and 108 residential units on the three upper floors. The building will be completed next year.

One block north, an old Anderson automotive building next year will have a new food hall, incubator space for perhaps a dozen chefs operating out of their individual stands. Their second-floor neighbors will be the occupants of a dance and yoga studio. The completion of this main street initiative will call for the redevelopment of the 2900 block in 2017.

One thing became clear in the course of our tour. Seawall is a private company, expecting to be successful in the development industry, but it is not driven by the need to maximize profits above all other values. Among other things, Morville and his business partner, Thibault Manekin, are interested in creating community, places where people are connected to one another and have a stake in their neighborhood.

As we returned to our starting point at 26th and Howard, Morville had us look at the irregular street geography on the northwest west corner. He noted that Seawall had accepted a Baltimore City offer that his company purchase a small triangle that included closing off an unused piece of street bed. He then asked us to imagine a large, circular brick fireplace, rising from this newly acquired parcel of real estate, all of this to serve as another community gathering space some years in the future. As we took in this inviting image, our group adjourned to partake of a hearty lunch at Parts and Labor, the combined restaurant and butcher shop developed by Seawall across the street from Miller's Court.

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