

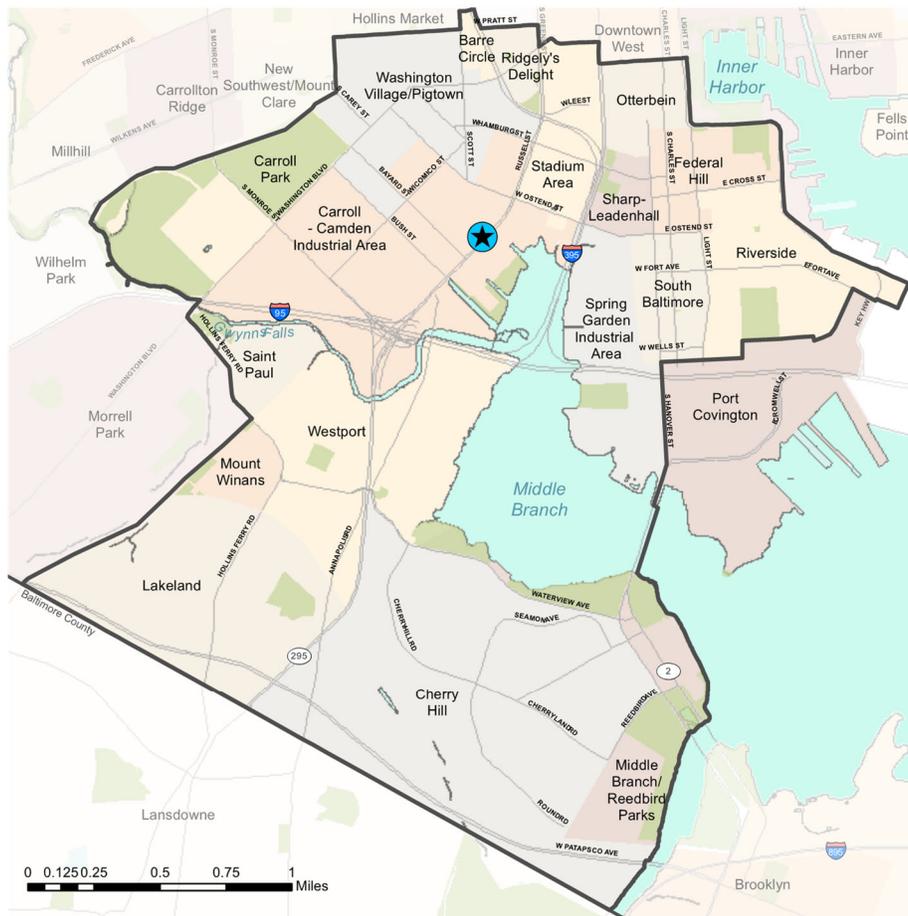
South Baltimore Gateway Partnership

A look at efforts by a non-profit to improve South Baltimore's built environment & neighborhoods

LAI Baltimore Chapter – April, 2019 meeting

Michael Cordes – Scribe

On April 17th, Brad Rogers visited with the Baltimore LAI Chapter to provide an overview of the efforts of the South Baltimore Gateway Partnership (SBGP) to effect transformational change in the areas surrounding the Middle Branch River in South Baltimore. Brad is the Executive Director of SBGP, and he provided the following map of the boundaries of the SBGP:



South Baltimore Gateway Community Impact District

 Casino

SBGP is funded by monies from the 3 casinos operating within Maryland that are each mandated to share a portion of their revenues with the neighborhoods near casino locations. Originally all casino revenues were funneled directly to Baltimore City's Local Development Council – Community Advisory Board. Over time, it became obvious that, in order to accelerate the pace of change, it was necessary to create a special-purpose public authority that could move quickly and without lots of red tape. A

collective desire to put this casino money to good use in a more timely fashion was the impetus for SBGP's founding. Now, ½ of the casino funding goes to Baltimore City and ½ goes to the SBGP, which is the more nimble of the recipients with respect to putting the money to work.

SBGP has a three-pronged mandate, as follows:

- Gives Community Grants
- Provides Enhanced Services
- Undertakes Transformational Projects

Brad advised that SBGP “just gave out \$500,000 in grants this week”, accompanying these grants with capacity building support as part of SBGP's ongoing effort to empower neighborhood organizations to “become more effective”. SBGP grants come in small (up to \$5,000), medium (up to \$50k), and large (up to \$100k). All grants are focused on encouraging neighborhoods and civic institutions to shape their own communities, while becoming increasingly professional and effective.

With respect to Services, SBGP's approach is best summarized by the following slide Brad provided:

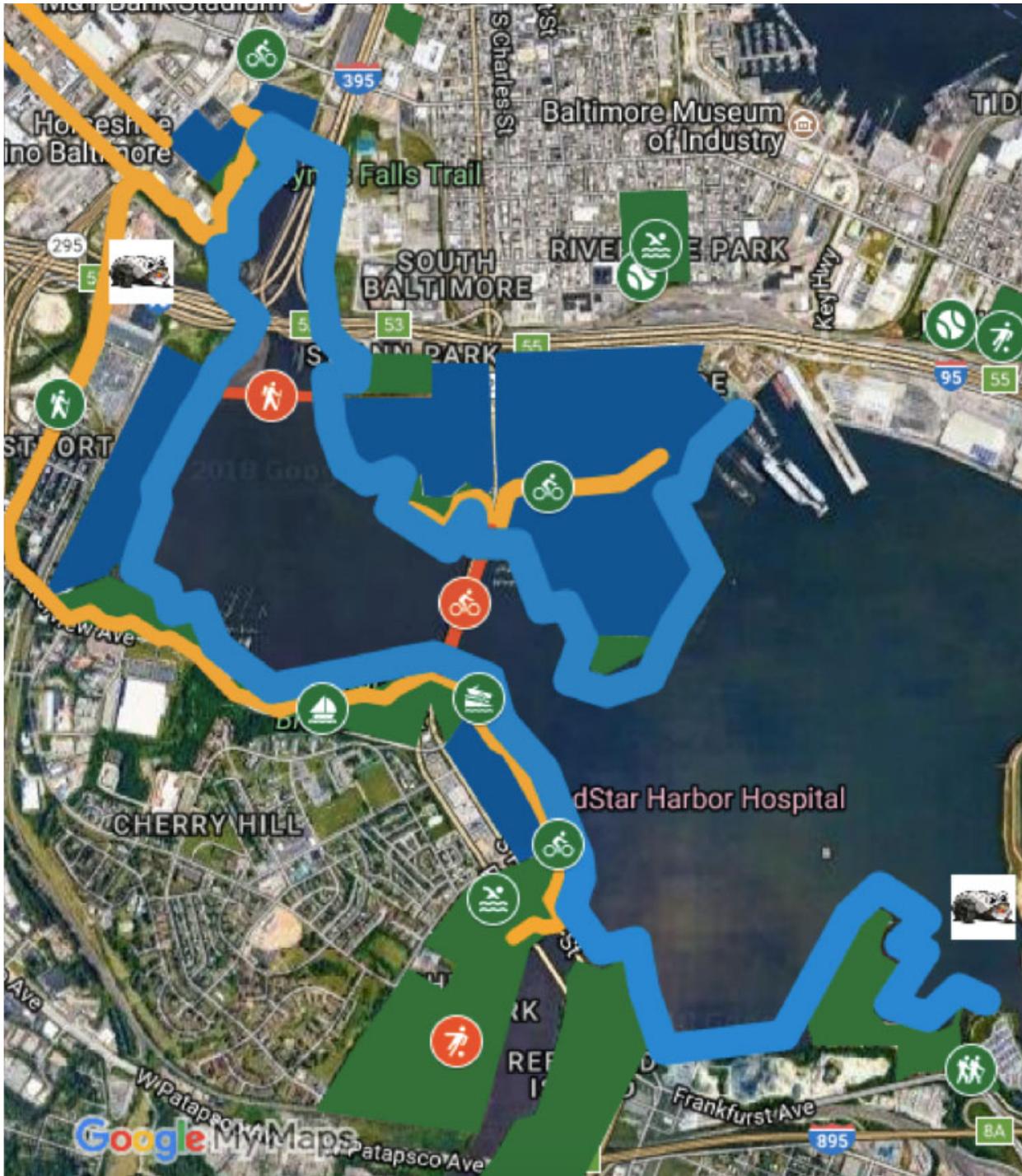
Enhanced Services

We are making major improvements to **parks and public spaces**:

- 1. Repairs and Improvements.** We are spending more than a million dollars a year to create the best parks in Baltimore, including a partnership with the Ripken Foundation and BCRP to build two major new ballfields in the next two years.
- 2. South Baltimore Gateway Sports League.** We are bringing together sports providers from across the city to build three seasons of free District-wide sports in five neighborhoods.
- 3. Main Street Enhancements.** Cleaning, greening, streetscape repairs, advertising, marketing, events, concerts.
- 4. 4th of July.** We are building a major 4th of July celebration on the Middle Branch, with an 8-hour waterfront music concert, mural gallery on Hanover Street Bridge, and fireworks spectacular.

Brad's obvious enthusiasm for his work with SBGP reached a crescendo when he spoke of the organization's “Transformational Projects”, which include “the reinvention of the Middle Branch of the Patapsco”. Brad envisions that SBGP's efforts to reconnect neighborhoods to the Middle Branch's shorelines will be “transformative like the Inner Harbor [was for the City's CBD], but neighborhood oriented”. Plans for an 11 mile long park network, including hiking/biking trails, recreation centers, ball fields, and waterfront access that would include the waterfront areas of Port Covington (adjacent to SBGP) are proceeding rapidly. Three design firms are currently vying to finalize the specifics of the trail,

and “one will be chosen soon”. Brad provided this image of the waterfront showing how there are already large numbers of public parks, trails, and large development/institutionally owned parcels already along the shoreline:



In addition to the substantial enhancements to the waterfront, SBGP’s Transformational Projects include contributing to a \$20M fitness & wellness center to be constructed in the Cherry Hill neighborhood on

the south side of the Middle Branch. This facility will bring “world class recreational and public health programming to the District”.

SBGP’s third effort at transformational improvement consists of an experiment wherein it is providing 3 years of sustained funding for three Community Development Corporations (CDC’s). With sustained funding, it is hoped that these local CDC’s can avoid spending most of their time fund-raising, and focus instead on improving their neighborhoods in a more professional, consistent manner. This effort compliments the aforementioned Community Grants in encouraging CDC’s to become more effective advocates for healthy neighborhood environments.

Brad then apprised the group of several innovative initiatives under consideration by SBGP to further the Middle Branch area’s transformation with the following slide:

Examples of Transformational Projects Currently Under Development

The following projects have not yet been approved, but are currently under development:

- 1. Development Subsidy Fund.** We may pair our CDC Operating Support fund with a Development Subsidy Fund to support predevelopment costs and gap financing.
- 2. Baltimore Ride:** Provide subsidized \$2 Lyft rides, connecting people to 5 grocery stores, 5 farmers markets, 7 medical centers, and hundreds of employers. This may eventually include long-haul rides to Tradeport Atlantic, BWI Business District, Guinness, etc.

Brad advised that the Development Subsidy Fund is an attempt to “make CDC’s into developers”, such that they begin to proactively advocate for the type of developments they want to see happen in their neighborhoods, instead of just reacting to development proposals by for-profit developers. Ideally they would be creating, or partnering with the private sector to create, innovative new projects.

The effort to create a “Baltimore Ride Zone” wherein all Lyft rides are subsidized down to \$2/ride, is “the first of this initiative in the Country”. Brad expects the idea to eventually gain acceptance in other areas of the City and could spread to help mitigate food deserts elsewhere.

In spite of a long career working as real estate professional in Baltimore, this writer was completely unaware of the SBGP and its innovative initiatives. Brad’s excellent presentation, including plans like the waterfront hiking/biking trail and the Baltimore Ride Zone, are examples of why LAI luncheons are so valuable in rounding out any RE professional’s perspective. The members of Baltimore’s LAI Chapter thank Brad for his excellent work and his informative presentation!

