

Progress Report: East Baltimore Development Initiative (EBDI)

On March 16, 2016, just over one year into his new role as CEO/President of East Baltimore Development Initiative (EBDI), Raymond “Ray” Skinner provided an overview of the status of this complex, 14 year old redevelopment/revitalization project in East Baltimore. Characterized as one of the country’s largest urban renewal and relocation efforts, Skinner knows and understands the landscape of the “Middle East” neighborhood in East Baltimore; he began his career as Baltimore City’s Principal City Planner from 1974-77 under then-Director of Planning Larry Reich. The area, shaped like a piano, is located just north of the Johns Hopkins Medical Institution.



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Skinner comes superbly equipped to deal with the remaining challenges of this multi-billion dollar effort. While serving 12 years as Maryland’s Secretary of Housing and Community Development during the terms of Governors Parris Glendening and more recently, Martin O’Malley, he already is accustomed to dealing and negotiating with the multiple stakeholders of this hugely ambitious effort. These include the State Legislature; Baltimore players including the City government, Annie E. Casey Foundation; Johns Hopkins University and Medical System; federal government, corporate sector, private and non-profit developers, and community and neighborhood organizations.

For three years beginning in 2001, there were many community meetings leading up to 2004 when the 501(c)(3) East Baltimore Development Initiative (EBDI) was created with authority vested by the City, State, Institutional and nonprofit partners to bring about the redevelopment; also in 2004 the Master Developer Forest City Enterprises was selected by RFP. Core values were enunciated for this mega 88 acre project.

These include:

- Community Engagement and involvement in all aspects of plan implementation;
- Responsible Relocation of the low-income residents of 750 occupied homes by provision of enhanced benefits and services such as family advocacy, drug and job counseling coupled with an opportunity to return to their neighborhood;
- Economic Inclusion involving minority equity participation plus minority and local contracting (MBE/WBE/LBE), local hiring and a community re-investment fund;
- Affordable Housing with 1/3 of all new units developed in the project area mandated to be affordable. This means for rental, household income may not exceed fifty percent (50%) Adjusted Medium Income (AMI) and for homeownership, PITI is affordable to households with income at less than 80% AMI.

Skinner announced successes and challenges to date for each value. Of the families whose homes were acquired in 2006 by eminent domain and relocated, the average net increase in a family's net worth was \$157,000. Renters also received enhanced benefits over and above what was required under the federal Uniform Relocation Act. While there is an opportunity for residents to return, there is not a 'right' with attached subsidies. EBDI did a recent survey of relocated residents and while many feel they are better off than before relocation, there is still significant interest in returning to the Middle East community. Children of former Middle East residents receive priority for attending the Henderson-Hopkins School, a new community school developed in cooperation with and administered by the Johns Hopkins University School of Education. Opened in January 2014, the school anchors the east end of the area. (See New York Times article on March 18, 2014 profiling the school). Transportation assistance to the school is provided for relocated school children by EBDI.

For economic inclusion, EBDI has met all targets except for women owned businesses. A women's contractor college was started to boost this target. 1,500 permanent jobs have been created including ones at Walgreens. Additional local hires will be offered at Marriott's 194 room, 15 story extended stay Residence Inn; opening is projected for fall 2017. For MBE Subcontracting, the actual is 35% (\$126.3 million) exceeding the goal of 27%. Almost 22 percent are Baltimore City-based minority businesses. Spearheading new development and job creation in 2008 was the 281,000 Rangos Life Sciences Building with state of the art chem and biology labs. In 2015, 235,000 square feet was added by MD Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for its Medical Examiners Public Health Lab.

For housing, between the 215 rental apartments completed and those underway, almost 45% of the projected residential rental market will be completed by 2018. Three of the projects have affordable units through developers' use of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit. An additional 321 units of graduate student housing in a 20 story tower are occupied. Market rate housing hovers around \$259,000. Mr. Skinner said affordable homeownership is lagging, and he has engaged expertise in developing a plan. Hopkins employees are eligible for \$25,000 towards buying a home in the project area through its Live Near Your Work Program.

In 2011, revisions to the Master Plan occurred, consolidating the scattered site open space into the 3 block amenity-loaded Eager Park. New homes will be built overlooking the Park. The \$12.3 million package of funding came from State Capital Budget, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), former Rouse Chair Anthony Deering Foundation, and Executives at T. Rowe Price. Like the Henderson-Hopkins School to the East, Eager Park is another anchor in this community rebuilding. Over \$60 million in public funds has gone into quality infrastructure resulting in 1.5 miles of new streets with below grade utilities, lights, sidewalks and trees.

Eager Park - Overview

- 5 Acre Park
- Programmed activities to include concerts & farmers markets
- Amenities: amphitheater, pavilion, playing fields, etc.
- Opening 2016



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The newly created New East Baltimore Community Association (NEBCA) which functions as a Business Improvement District (BID) will own, maintain and program activities for the Park. 24/7 security is provided by NEBCA and Johns Hopkins Medical System security.

According to Skinner, remaining challenges are funding. For infrastructure, an additional \$20 to 25 million is needed. Over \$60 million in public funds already has been invested in quality infrastructure resulting in 1.5 miles of new streets with below grade utilities, lights, sidewalks and trees. One of the two planned 1,150 space parking garages is completed.

A Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) was created to pay for some of the public infrastructure and some of the other activities in the EBDI area. EBDI's role has changed over the years and with it staff has been reduced accordingly as certain functions have been completed like land acquisition and relocation, and others like workforce development and the clean and safe program have been transitioned to other organizations. At one time EBDI had over 100 employees. Now it is operating with 11 employees.

Skinner did not provide details of the change in the Property Tax yield of the piano shaped project area during the past 5 years or what increase is projected after 5 more years. He also noted that Johns Hopkins Medical System has more than 21,000 employees and is marketing the EBDI area as a destination where people can live, work, and play.

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