

The transformation of Baltimore Peninsula

Joe Nathanson//October 3, 2024//



It was sometime in 2023 that I had last visited this stretch of land jutting into the Baltimore Harbor. The area once known as Port Covington, but since rebranded as Baltimore Peninsula, was clearly undergoing significant change. But at the time it was a cluster of commercial office buildings kept away from prying eyes behind barbed-wire fencing.

More recently I visited the area with a colleague. After a satisfying lunch at Nick's Fish House, we looked around and were at once struck by the buzz of activity taking place and the number of cranes poking high into the sky. The level of construction activity and the variety of commercial and residential uses that will be accommodated strongly suggests that 2024 will be the year that Baltimore Peninsula comes into its own.

Indeed, we learned that people had already begun moving into this area. As we traipsed around, we discovered the townhouses of Locke Landing – deriving its name from the Locke Insulator Company, manufacturers of high-quality porcelain insulators for General Electric. Locke, which ran 15 kilns and employed 500 workers at its peak, had a major presence in this location for almost a century, until it closed in 2017.

The former industrial site is now the home of a tightly packed townhome community, with 16-and 20-foot-wide units selling in the \$500,000s and

\$600,000s price range. Still to come are 24-foot wide, elevator equipped, townhouse units perched on the Patapsco waterfront, offering some serious luxury to this historically gritty part of the city.

Eventually this part of the development will be occupied by 400 some apartments and roughly a similar number of townhouses.

An even greater change is set to take place next month. That is when the first of some 1,500 Under Armour employees will migrate from their Tidepoint location in nearby Locust Point to the company's new headquarters building.

The five-story, 280,000 square foot structure, designed by Gensler, the architectural firm with offices across North America and around the globe, features a façade of glass and polymer that has stadium-type signage, with the Under Armour name and ubiquitous logo easily visible to travelers on the nearby Interstate 95 expressway.

Gensler says its design choices maximize energy efficiency and sustainability: "The selection of mass timber as the building's structural material serves as a baseline that elevates the impact of many of its other sustainable design features, including geothermal heating and cooling, rainwater harvesting, a landscaped roof, solar panels, sun shades, and a premium HVAC system with energy recovery."

Inside the building, in addition to the core operations of the company, there will be a retail outlet for the public to avail themselves of UA gear. Beyond the building, there is a multisport athletic field, along with a track and field facility. The company will use the field to try out and assess its sports apparel but will soon also make the athletic facility available to the community.

The Under Armour headquarters building is part of a larger collection of office users. As of July, office occupancy for Baltimore Peninsula was reported to be 40 percent leased. The developers seem to have a knack for attracting eclectic

tenants. Early office tenants include Longeviti Neuro Solutions, a health care startup, and OBM Inc., a cryptocurrency firm.

There was also the recent announcement that the 12,000 square-foot dining venue, Rye Street Tavern, will be operated by the Washington, D.C.-based Clyde's Restaurant Group. Add to that the news that a Tex-Mex restaurant and karaoke bar will soon join the lineup of attractions along with other retail offerings.

All this change is head-spinning. This 235-acre swath of land was owned by the Western Maryland Railroad in the early part of the 20th-century. In more recent times the site served as the home of The Baltimore Sun's operations and printing plant, all now demolished. A similar fate befell a Sam's Club and a Walmart.

Now the developers, led by MAG Partners and MacFarlane Partners, have the opportunity to write the next chapter for this significant stretch of Baltimore's real estate. Their efforts, should they be fully realized, will create another transformation of the city in ways not imagined at the start of the 21st century.

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