

I live in Federal Hill and have had a small business downtown for 20 years. I have walked across the Inner Harbor over 7500 times. I have seen Harborplace at its best and its worst, but one thing is undeniable: it is the heart and soul of Baltimore.

The 2015 uprising, crime, Covid, gross mismanagement, the exodus from the traditional office, the demise of many retail models have all had their effect on Harborplace. Now it needs a lift.

I grew up on the west side of lower Manhattan near the Hudson River. Decades ago, it was a bleak, decrepit, industrial area not yet in transition.

And then in the 1990s, something truly magical happened.

A New York State public benefit corporation was formed to design and build a waterfront park from the Battery to midtown. The Hudson River Park opened in 1998.

The neighborhoods across from this park exploded with development. The popular retail and entertainment district we know as the Meatpacking district was born. Movie stars were moving in next to, low rise, subsidized housing projects. Michelin star restaurants began popping up.

BY 2015 the Hudson River Park had 17 million annual visitors.

Then in 2009, an old abandoned elevated freight train line that ran through the neighborhood was renovated into The Highline. 10 years later it had 8 million annual visitors. 8 MILLION VISITORS! A reimagined elevated freight train line. NOT retail. NOT restaurants. NOT office buildings. NOT high rise apartment towers. Just a nice place to walk a little bit closer to the sky.

It all worked. It activated not just my neighborhood but the whole city.

In contrast, as a New Yorker, I can tell you: high rise apartment building neighborhoods are absolute dead zones.

Preserving open public spaces, parks and promenades would work pretty well to activate Baltimore's Inner Harbor. People love to stroll, and attend kid friendly events and festivals such as Light City Baltimore, the Baltimore Book Festival or especially visiting Tall Ships. If you want to talk equity, visiting the Inner Harbor is free of charge and a great alternative if spending \$200 for a family of 4 just for tickets and a stuffed dolphin at the Aquarium isn't your thing.

Public spaces also transcend fluctuations in the real estate market, the economy, and even pandemics, civil unrest and natural disasters. They are timeless. If you preserve the public nature of Harborplace the surrounding areas of downtown and South Baltimore will thrive. "Less is more" seems to be a time proven adage. High rise residential and office towers are NOT public spaces.

Sometimes Baltimore makes mistakes. Old Town Mall comes to mind. I am sure that in just a few years we will look back at this Harborplace Plan, if it is built, and realize that we had just made a \$1billion preventable, horrible mistake, because as a city, we had not done our due diligence. We went with the only option presented to us.

The citizens of Baltimore, not developers, should making these decisions. How can we allow developers to write legislation that only benefits their misguided, for profit project, sold to the public with self serving “public engagement reports,” false narratives and eye candy renderings. Baltimore does not need another international public embarrassment.

We need to take a pause, and seriously explore other ideas, simpler ideas, lower cost ideas, realistic ideas that will give the citizens’ of Baltimore a large return on their investment and keep the Inner Harbor and Harborplace the iconic heart and soul of Baltimore. I urge you, don’t sell our soul.

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