

Economic & Community Development Testimony Against Bill #0448

My name is Rebecca Alban Hoffberger and I am the Co-Founder of a non profit business, The American Visionary Art Museum, that has been in continuous operation for 29 years, located on an award-winning 1.1 acre campus adjacent to the Baltimore inner Harbor. We host over 100 weddings, corporate, and charitable events each year, attracting a diverse international visitor following.

Specific to the oversight duties of your Economic and Development Committee, the following should be of all our urgent concern:

1. Private commercial development of Baltimore City's waterfront has already been dominated by luxury development, often with large public subsidies, that end up NOT being welcoming to middle-class, let alone poor people. The #1 group of Baltimore citizens sadly leaving Baltimore to live elsewhere is our Black Middle Class. This MCB plan's primary focus is luxury residential and office clientele.
2. For FAR FAR LESS public subsidy investment than what MCB is seeking to make their tall exclusive towers possible, the existing PEOPLE-scaled pavilions could be exquisitely renovated (living green roofs added) and new FAMILY-oriented attractions and delights added that could again make new global history as to what an amazing urban waterfront park can and should be for ALL - Baltimore citizens of all ages, tourists and visitors to the nearby convention center and ballparks. I want our kids to fall in love with their City again and be proud to show it off. For possible example, the year round Capital Wheel ferris wheel at the National Harbor, annually attracts well over half million riders. It has 1 million programmable LED colored lights (think "Go Ravens and seasonal Holiday wishes in bright lights) - and get this - it only cost \$1 million - paying for itself in its first year! Such an attraction could be free or hugely discounted to Baltimore hometown residents and children. It will afford visitors magic views of our whole City well out to the Bay.
3. The MCB proposed four towers boast adding 900 residential units while they would simultaneously EXTRACT or reduce values of the existing good faith residents and offices whose obstructed views will lower their property values and thereby taxes, greatly. Besides, why build new office buildings with tremendous vacancies just across the street?

4. There was never any INDEPENDENT traffic study, nor any INDEPENDENT Master Plan conducted for the MCB proposed development, one that also seeks to cannibalize multiple lanes of already congested Pratt and Light Streets and to control in perpetuity the balance of of our Inner Harbor PUBLIC Park by this private entity.
5. MCB's David Bramble is in this instance, a NO-BID developer, hand picked by our Mayor and gifted \$1 million of taxpayers money. Despite swearing by Mayor Scott's own admission our various City agencies to total secrecy, I have friends who saw preliminary MCB tall tower designs TWO YEARS BEFORE the supposed "open public input forums" were even held.
6. The HarborPlace pavilions are people-scaled, two-story structures that were able to be built on slab - with minor disruption of the ground beneath. The MCB Tall towers will require deep excavation and enormous steel pylons reaching 150-200-Ft down to deep bedrock to adequately hold their 32 and 25 proposed story heights, weight and width. Going from reasonable height restraints to UNLIMITED under the control of ONE developer is a horrendous idea.
7. An Act of The US Congress gifted these formerly classified US Waters to be conveyed in perpetuity as a Baltimore City public park. The properties ONCE United States' bay waters, were formed to create the HarborPlace land entirely by FILL from the debris of the Great Baltimore Fire, oyster shells, and traces of toxic Chromium. Penetrating the fill ground will require a costly and time consuming environmental extraction and disposal - a massive disruption required to build adequately strong foundations for MCB's tall towers. Setting those deep steel foundation beams will take years of staging and mega months of high decibel NOISY AND ALL DAY LONG pounding.

In Summary: For FAR LESS public money, FAR MORE PEOPLE FUN, and FAR MORE QUICKLY, we can maintain the current height restrictions to create a better than ever HarborPlace, one welcoming to locals, families and tourists alike - touting Baltimore's amazing history of sports legends, creatives, and social justice leaders in a Baltimore Walk of Fame, Wit & Wisdom extending down Conway and around inscribed upon the pavers of the entire new and to be raised, Promenade. A true Baltimore Celebration, people-scaled place of communal fun, safety, shared harbor beauty and Joy! As Carl Stokes wisely observed from his most recent visit to the pop up German Christmas Fair, "People say no one will visit HarborPlace anymore. But at very little expense or effort, the temporary skating rink, the neon ferris wheel, and the food and craft holiday mart were packed to capacity with smiling faces."

Please say NO, or at least insist on a DELAY for any approval of Bill and related proposals from MCB until RESPONSIBLE and INDEPENDENT impact studies are completed, and maybe better less expensive ideas considered. What you decide NOW will greatly affect MANY generations to come.