

## **Statement of M.J. (Jay) Brodie to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore**

Before you are opportunity and challenges that will determine the future of our city.

The opportunity is to renew the center of the Inner Harbor, once an internationally acclaimed model of urban planning and urban and architectural design. As one example, my late friend and colleague Neville Quarry, charged with the revitalization of Sydney Australia's darling harbor, brought his associates here for a week of in-depth study of Baltimore's accomplishment at Harborplace.

The Rouse Company's development by Jim Rouse, Matt DeVito and Bruce Alexander under the excellent management of Tony Hawkins with the thriving pavilions of Harborplace was the centerpiece of the Inner Harbor. Sadly, subsequent owners and managers failed to understand the Baltimore market and vacancies and deterioration followed.

Now, with MCB's acquisition of Harborplace out of receivership, a new chapter can be written.

The challenges are real: climate change and flooding, the changing retail market, competition from Harbor East and Harborpoint, Covid and its impact on commercial real estate, plus the emergence of a substantial downtown residential population.

Is it time to say "goodbye" to Harborplace's two pavilions? To my knowledge, there has not been a public report of possibilities of rehabilitation, alteration and/or additions. But assuming a cleared site, what then?

The MCB proposal is not simply to replace Harborplace. It is to repeal a significant portion of the Inner Harbor Urban Renewal Plan, authored by the nationally respected planning firm Wallace McHarg Roberts & Todd after reviewing several alternative concepts.

Shouldn't we expect a similar professional and creative effort as the basis for today's architectural design? My answer is "absolutely yes." I believe that the lack of such "foundational" professional work explains, in large part, the two negative reviews by the city's Urban Design and Architectural Advisory Panel (UDAAP).

We are fortunate to have MCB under the leadership of David Bramble making major development investments in our city. I have visited their projects and respect the attention to scale and detail and how well they fit in to the neighborhoods.

But MCB's Inner Harbor designs show no such sensitivity to Baltimore's scale or other qualities. Rather, the designs suggest the high-rise aspects of Houston, Dallas or Atlanta injected into our most sensitive Inner Harbor setting.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime project. It should be — and will be — evaluated not on how fast it was done but how well. To take more time, particularly in a coming period of declining interest rates, should not be a hindrance. And if the cost of additional planning

and urban design studies is a factor, the Greater Baltimore Committee should be asked to assist, as they have done in the past.

It's time for a pause and reflection. And our collective determination to meet the moment — both the opportunity and the challenges — to assure that we pass our city on to future generations "stronger, better and more beautiful" as the ancient Athenians vowed in their oath of citizenship.

*M.J. "Jay" Brodie is former president of the Baltimore Development Corporation and former commissioner of the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development.*