

Revitalizing the Belair Road Corridor

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About ULI Baltimore

ULI Baltimore is the local District Council for ULI – The Urban Land Institute. ULI Baltimore is a 501(c)3, and serves Central Maryland and various other parts of Maryland through its outreach efforts. As a trusted convener for sharing knowledge and as an unbiased source for timely land use information, ULI Baltimore provides a critical link to improving state and local land use policy and development practices.

ULI is a nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the institute now has more than 40,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines in private enterprise and public service.

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The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

About the Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

The objective of ULI Baltimore's Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program is to provide expert, multidisciplinary advice on land use and real estate issues facing public agencies and nonprofit organizations in the Greater Baltimore Metropolitan Region. Similar to other ULI District Councils throughout the country, ULI Baltimore utilizes its broad membership base to administer one and one-half day panels, offering objective and responsible advice to local stakeholders and decision makers on a diverse set of land use and real estate issues. These issues can range from site-specific projects to public policy strategies. The unique flexibility of the TAP program allows for a customized approach to specific contextual issues related to urban development.

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The TAP Committee appreciates the volunteer effort of the distinguished panel that developed the findings for this report:

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Executive Summary

In March 2011, ULI Baltimore partnered with the City of Baltimore and Baltimore County to convene 11 volunteer expert panelists to recommend a comprehensive, yet strategic, approach to positioning Belair Road to continue to appeal to the surrounding neighborhoods and thrive in the 21st century.

The ULI Baltimore Regionalism Committee initiated this exercise, known as the Belair Road Technical Assistance Panel (TAP), to foster increased collaboration among neighboring jurisdictions. The ULI Baltimore TAP program generally seeks to provide expert, multidisciplinary advice on land use and real estate issues facing public agencies and nonprofit organizations in the Greater Baltimore Metropolitan Region. Thus, the purpose of the Belair Road TAP is to better understand the potential to revitalize the Belair Road corridor over the short- and long-term.

With a deep cross-section of expertise in economic development, transportation, and urban design among other disciplines, the TAP effort commenced with an introduction of the Belair Road TAP Study Area by city and county representatives, followed by a tour of the corridor and several roundtable discussions with area stakeholders and public officials.

Based on this dense information exchange, the panel developed a Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy for Belair Road that focused on the following:

- **Nodes** that serve as potential hubs of activity, ready for multi-modal (pedestrian, vehicular, transit, bicycle) improvements and long-term redevelopment.
- **Opportunity Sites** that serve as areas of initial investment due to favorable development characteristics such as adequate parcel configurations and depths, available land, distinctive physical assets, and capacity for walkability.
- **Linkages** between Nodes that encourage more residential uses between nodes in order to add a critical mass of residents and consumers, while clustering retail and service-based businesses at nodes and opportunity sites.

Additionally, the panel developed several targeted approaches to implementation. These include:

- **Economic Development Strategies** that examine the local residential, commercial, entertainment, and niche market potential, match real estate potential with development opportunities, and outline the steps necessary to attract investment along the corridor.
- **Sense of Place/Branding Strategies** that position the corridor as an attractive destination to shop for unique goods and services and enjoy community programming and events.

- **Residential Neighborhood Strategies** that emphasize the preservation of existing neighborhood character as well as identify new housing opportunities at the corridor's nodes and within the "linkage areas" between nodes.
- **Conceptual Design Strategies** that explore innovative design solutions to some of the barriers to revitalization and incorporate inventive design principles and standards that naturally allow for a co-location of uses, shared parking, better transition of commercial to residential uses, and the prevention of crime.
- **Streetscape and Transportation Strategies** that correct traffic flow and navigation, provide efficient and manageable solutions for parking and accessibility, increase the corridor's "curb appeal", promote walkability and improved connections, and incorporate wayfinding measures.
- **Infrastructure Improvement Strategies** that identify capacity requirements for more intense development at nodes and opportunity sites and explore innovative and coordinated solutions to meet the rising demands on utilities such as water and sewer.
- **Public Policy Strategies** that promote the use of existing regulatory and program tools to encourage investment and reassess existing zoning and land use designations along the corridor, particularly within nodes and opportunity sites, to allow for multiple types and densities of uses.



The Panel's Assignment

Baltimore City and Baltimore County partnered with the ULI Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to conduct a targeted analysis of Belair Road for the purposes of exploring potential redevelopment opportunities along the corridor and providing recommendations on the key steps necessary to reposition this historic transportation artery into a prospering corridor.

Prior to this TAP, several planning processes and collaborative neighborhood efforts occurred among residents and representatives from the city and county to examine the current social, economic, physical, architectural, and regulatory framework along the Belair Road corridor and discuss the improvements necessary to promote positive change within the community.

These various initiatives and small-scale implementation measures have contributed greatly to maintaining neighborhood stability in recent years. However, with the current economic recession and the changing automotive industry, several businesses, particularly auto dealerships, along the corridor have permanently closed, leaving pockets of vacant and underutilized properties. Recognizing the threat of neighborhood decline as well as development opportunities created by the loss of such businesses, this TAP was commissioned to establish an action plan to foster a sense of place and community, improve auto and pedestrian mobility, promote economic development and increase employment activity, and strive for long-term vitality. As such, the city and county presented the panel with several key questions:

- What revitalization strategies could reposition the Belair Road corridor for a turnaround and sustainable growth?
- Are there specific locations where revitalization should begin?
- Which of the identified nodes (or collection of nodes) have the strongest potential for redevelopment and could bring about substantial positive change?
- What specific revitalization efforts on Belair Road can positively influence and strengthen surrounding residential neighborhoods?
- What components of the streetscape are most promising for recreating a sense of place and the impression that one has entered a unique community?
- Is it possible to transform Belair Road into a more pedestrian-friendly mixed-use place without disrupting commuter traffic?

With the questions above, the panel embarked on a two-day work session, meeting with a diverse array of stakeholders, touring the Belair Road corridor and its neighborhoods, engaging area residents and business owners, and discussing the vast amount of information gathered for the purposes of this exercise.

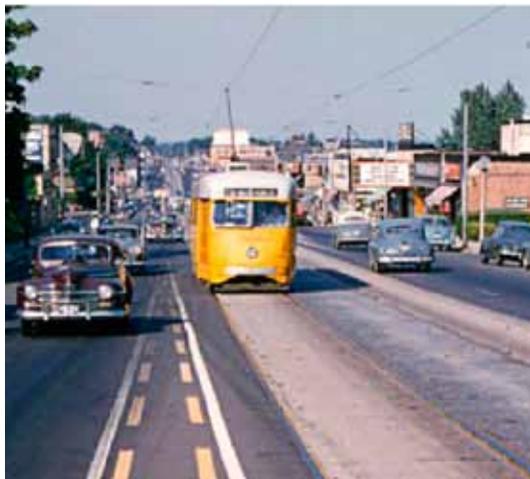


Introduction

History

Since the late 19th century, Belair Road served as a vital artery linking Baltimore and Harford counties to Downtown Baltimore's Central Business District. Beginning first as a main transportation route to bring agricultural goods produced in Northeast Maryland to businesses in the urban core, Belair Road eventually evolved into a prominent streetcar corridor in the early 1900s, encouraging widespread settlement due to new and growing economic opportunities at this time.

As the area developed over time and the viability of streetcars declined due to shifting economic industry and the birth of the automobile, the characteristics of the corridor also transitioned. Residences along Belair Road converted to small commercial establishments, creating a narrow, linear commercial land pattern that ultimately stretched along the corridor. Increased automobile use and attractive land configurations allowed auto dealerships and automobile services to emerge as predominant business types for the last several decades of the 20th century.

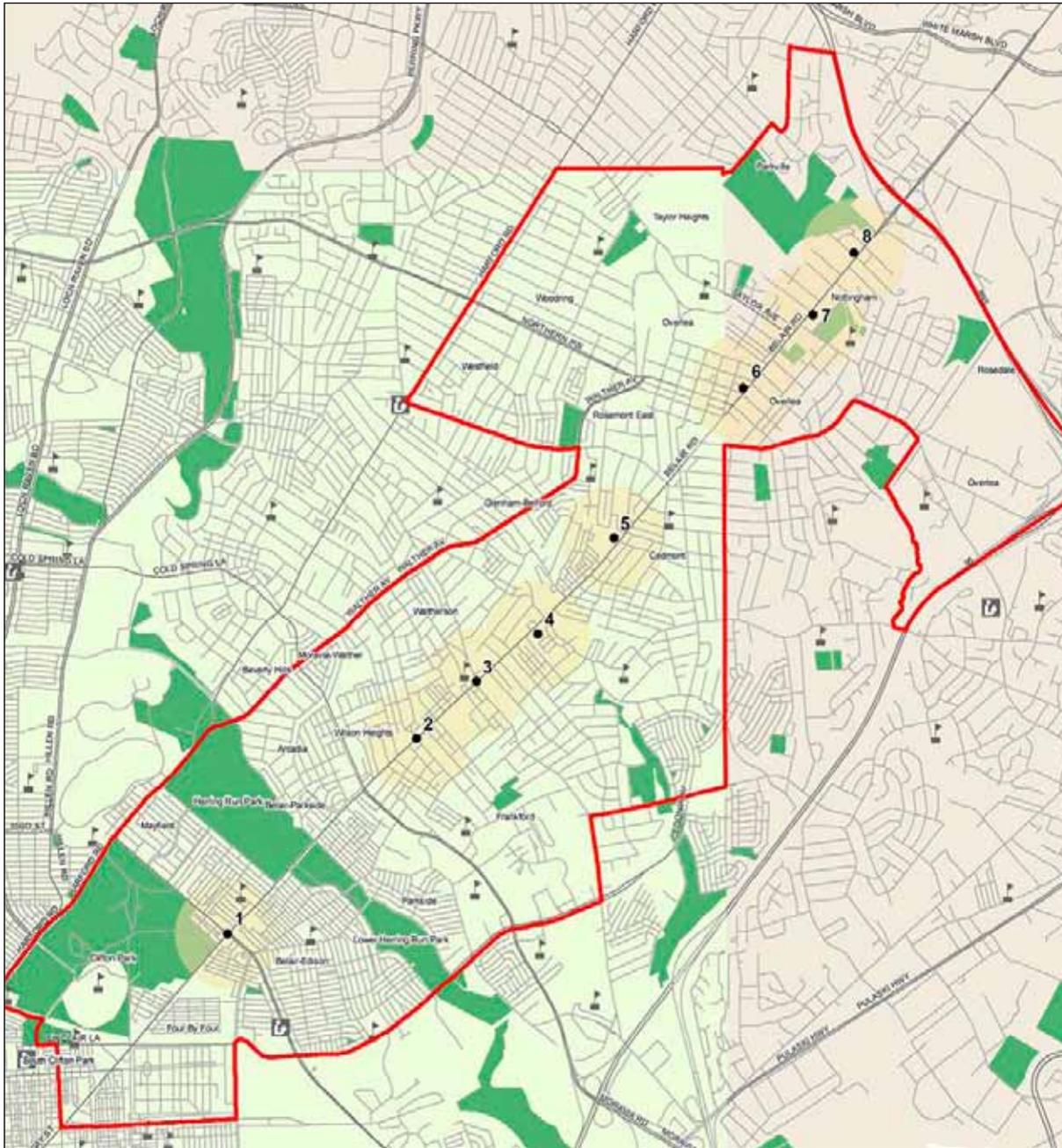


In recent years, the changing automobile industry triggered the closure or relocation of many auto dealerships along Belair Road, resulting in large pockets of vacant buildings and underutilized sites. Additionally, the nationwide economic recession spurred further turnover of small retail establishments and other signs of neighborhood decline.

Physical Attributes of the TAP Study Area
The Belair Road TAP Study Area extends five miles from the Baltimore Beltway (I-695) in the county to the Belair Edison community of Baltimore City at the southern end. While this exercise considered the physical context surrounding Belair Road, the panel primarily focused on the properties along the immediate corridor. The city and county originally identified eight nodes along Belair Road for consideration by the panel (see image on the following page).

Beginning from its northernmost point in Baltimore County, Belair Road has great access to major transportation routes such as I-695, I-95, White Marsh Blvd, and Joppa Road. This portion of Belair Road contains mostly small-scale retail and service-oriented uses as well as a recently renovated shopping center—Belair Beltway Plaza—that hosts myriad businesses selling various goods or offering an array of medical-related services. As one continues southward, several small strip centers with a variety of establishments (e.g., beauty salons, tax services, law offices, food carry-out, taverns, etc.) are scattered along the corridor along stand-alone businesses and a limited number of full-service restaurants.

Several community facilities ranging from religious institutions to service organiza-



Original 8 Nodes:

- 1. Belair Rd & Erdman Ave (Belair-Edison)*
- 2. Belair Rd & Woodlea Ave*
- 3. Belair Rd & Frankford Ave*
- 4. Belair Rd & Hamilton Ave*
- 5. 5960 Belair Rd*
- 6. Belair Rd & Fleetwood Ave* / 6908 Belair Rd**
- 7. 7500 Block of Belair Rd**
- 8. Beltway Plaza Shopping Center area**

** represents nodes within Baltimore City*
*** represents nodes within Baltimore County*

tions lie along Belair Road and throughout the neighborhoods. These include, but not limited to, The Maryland School for the Blind, St. Michael the Arch Angel Church and School, Overlea United Methodist Church, and Natural History Society of Maryland. Tucked behind many of these institutions and within the residential areas are a number of parochial and public neighborhood schools. Travelling further southward into Baltimore City, the building stock composition continues to consist of strip centers and stand-alone businesses. As one approaches Frankford Avenue, the character of Belair Road begins to shift with converted rowhomes, hosting a mix of small independent businesses or modest ground-floor establishments with apartments above. On-street parking, wide sidewalks, and a pedestrian-oriented streetscape are additional features that characterize Belair Road at the southernmost tip of the study area.

Residential land uses predominantly represent the areas surrounding Belair Road. In the County and the northern portion of the City are single-family detached dwellings built on deep, narrow lots as well as semi-detached rowhouses and apartment buildings. The architecture includes a mix of older Victorians,

cottages, bungalows and newly constructed dwellings. Farther south in the City, blocks of row homes and garden style apartments are more prevalent. Much of the residential development was constructed in the mid-1900s.

Lastly, the community is spotted with a series of parks and open spaces including Double Rock Park, Belmont Park Clifton Park, and Herring Run Park.

After much analysis of the nodes and corridor as a whole, the panel ultimately focused on five key areas for this report—three nodes and two opportunity sites. More discussion about these areas can be found on page 10 of this report.



6900 block of Belair Rd.



Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Barriers to Revitalization

When evaluating an area for redevelopment potential, it is critical to examine the existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and barriers to revitalization. Using the information gathered from roundtable sessions with area stakeholders, on-the-ground assessments and observations during the tour, and a packet of information about the neighborhood's history and recent revitalization efforts, the panel discussed the existing assets, liabilities, and opportunities of Belair Road.

Strengths

Location: The Belair Road corridor offers strong linkages to Downtown Baltimore City and the suburban job centers of Baltimore County, providing a convenient commute to residents and workers alike and drawing traffic volumes attractive to retailers.

Existing Public Transit: Belair Road is home to several bus routes that further foster connections east-west and north-south.

Existing Recreational, Community & Institutional Anchors: The corridor has many historic churches actively engaged in the local community, numerous recreational areas well-utilized by residents of all ages, a nonprofit museum (the Natural History Society of Maryland) well-known for its historic and cultural artifacts, and several other community-serving institutions.



Stable Residential Areas: Solid household incomes, steady home prices, high rates of home ownership, and low vacancy rates characterize the neighborhoods surrounding Belair Road, in addition to a rich historic housing stock, diverse housing types, and housing affordability in line with resident incomes.

Great Community Spirit: Evidenced by active neighborhood organizations, unique communities, and engaged stakeholder participation for this TAP event, the community fabric of the Belair Road neighborhoods is strong and dedicated to protecting and uplifting the neighborhood.

Cooperating Jurisdictions: Close cooperation between Baltimore City and Baltimore County brings additional momentum and commitment to positive change throughout the community.

Weaknesses

Health/Quality of Existing Retail: While Belair Road offers many retail uses to support the daily needs of residents and passersby, the types of existing tenants along the corridor suggests the area struggles to attract and keep high-quality retail tenants.

Lack of Major Employment Centers: The majority of residents travel primarily to Downtown Baltimore or the northeastern suburbs for work, due to a limited number of jobs and employment types along the corridor.

Prevalent Commercial Zoning: The current regulatory environment along Belair Road is largely commercial zoning along the corridor's edge, creating an extensive linear network of small businesses, strip retail centers, and stand-alone establishments. The over-commercialization of Belair Road has diluted the diversity of corridor and contributed to a lack of identity.

Auto-Oriented Corridor Context: Over the last few decades, Belair Road predominantly reads as an auto-oriented corridor due to both the type of uses (e.g. car dealerships) and the strip commercial fabric. This perception challenges the ability to attract other uses to the area.

Pervasive Visual Clutter: The excessive signage along Belair Road contributes to a visually chaotic experience for drivers, particularly at night, which adds to the existing interrupted and aggravated traffic flow.

Deficient Infrastructure: The current condition of Belair Road is indicative of aging pedestrian, vehicular, and utility infrastructure, with very narrow sidewalks, limited on-street parking, ill-placed utility poles, limited walkability, and excessive curb cuts that contribute to a stifled traffic flow.

Crime & Distress: Burgeoning intensity in perceptions about crime and other neighborhood stressors creates significant quality of life challenges for residents of Belair Road and contributes to a negative public perception.

Opportunities

Pockets of Vacant & Underutilized Sites: Along the corridor, several large, vacant and/or underutilized sites carry the potential for large-scale, economic development and positive neighborhood turnover.

Retail Leakage Capture: The comprehensive transformation of Belair Road will have a positive impact on its ability to capture consumer spending occurring outside of the Belair Road trade area. Establishing strong pockets of high-quality retail and services will increase the area's competitiveness with neighboring trade areas and core retail hubs.



6600 block of Belair Rd at Northern Parkway

Strong Market for Aging-in-Place and Institutionally Sponsored-Housing: The large elderly resident population suggests near-term potential to develop feasible housing choices for seniors in order to maintain this core resident base. Local institutions (e.g., area churches) may have resources to provide this type of housing, coupling it with existing and new social services.

Active Neighborhood Branding & Programming: Given the strong community fabric, active neighborhood programming and public branding events will contribute to a unique identity for the corridor as a whole.

Barriers to Revitalization

Physical Constraints to Development: Two major physical constraints impact the properties along Belair Road: the fluctuating terrain and shallow lot depths. Both conditions create obstacles to fully utilizing a site and attracting the preferred type of quality businesses to the area, particularly modern retailers.

Absentee Property Owners: Absentee individuals or entities from outside of the area own several properties along Belair Road. Such properties can impede on revitalization if they are left to deteriorate, if there are issues with title to the property, and/or if the owner is unreachable or unwilling to redevelop.

Viable Uses Not Yet Ready for Redevelopment: A common obstacle to many areas of study for revitalization is the current economic viability of existing establishments. A number of sites along Belair Road, including those within the identified nodes, remain profitable and as such, landlords are not yet incentivized to redevelop their properties. While this occurrence is widespread, it implies a multi-year approach to reinvigorating the corridor, beginning with components currently ripe for change (e.g., vacant and underutilized sites; infrastructure improvements; etc.) and establishing long-term plans for areas economically feasible at the present time.

Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy

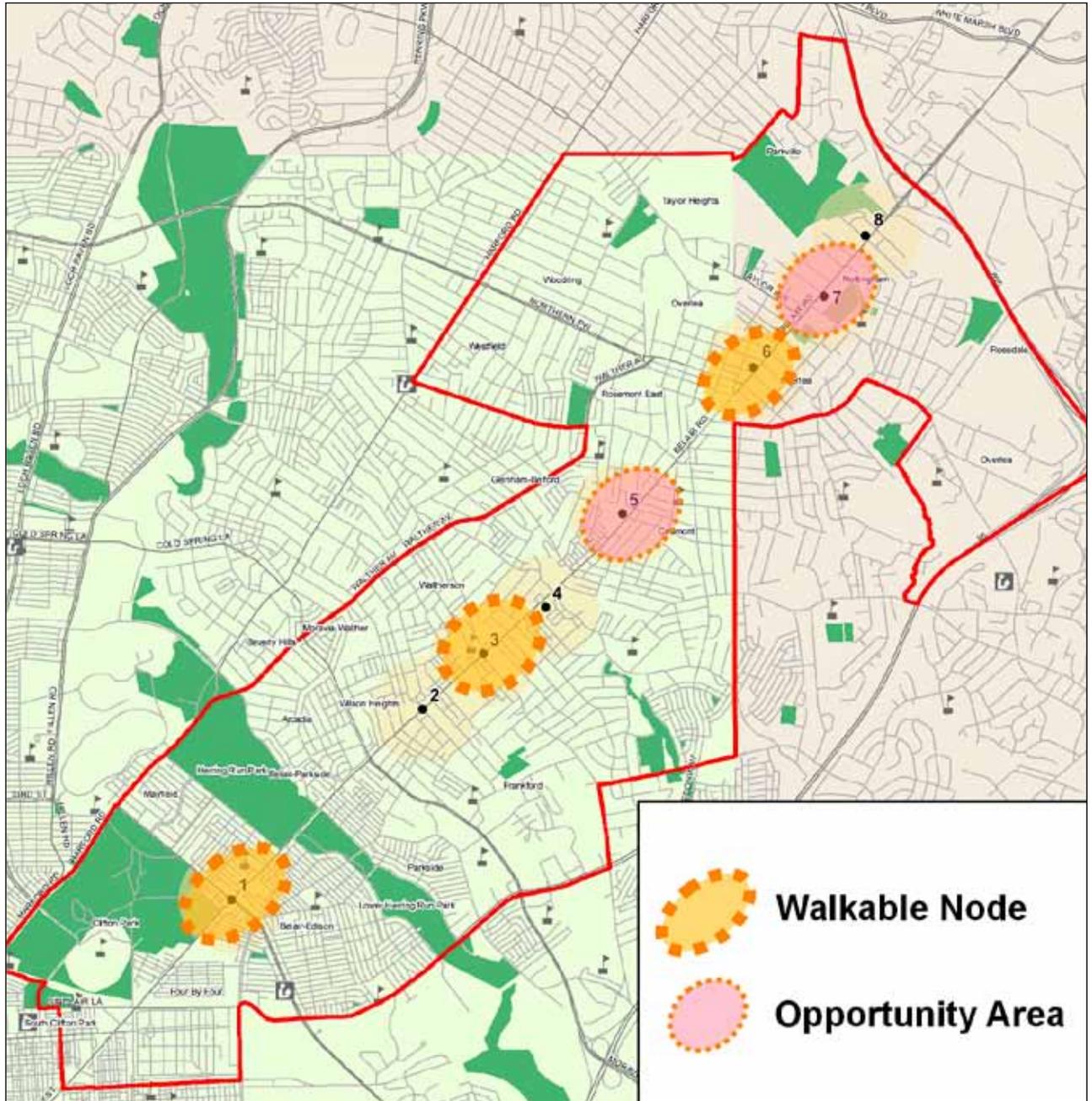
The TAP panel developed a comprehensive, yet strategic, approach to restoring the vitality of Belair Road that seeks to build upon the positive attributes of the corridor and halt the evident trends of decline. The actions and recommendations presented herein are a starting point to the corridor’s revitalization, as many elements of the framework strategy require further study prior to implementation. However, the panel desires this report to serve as a platform from which well-informed decisions are made to reinvigorate Belair Road. Thus, the panel’s Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy concentrates on the following:

- **Nodes**
- **Opportunity Sites**
- **Linkages between Nodes**

The city and county originally identified eight nodes along Belair Road for consideration by the panel. After much analysis of the nodes and corridor as a whole, the panel focused on five key areas—three nodes and two opportunity sites (see the map on page 11). For the purposes of this report, nodes are areas with a unique character that serve as existing hubs of activity and opportunity sites are areas with short-term redevelopment potential. Pages 12 thru 17 discuss the nodes, opportunity sites, and linkages between nodes in detail.



3400 block of Belair Rd near Erdman Ave.



Belair Road Nodes & Opportunity Sites

Nodes:

- 1. Belair-Edison
- 3. Gardenville
- 6. Overlea

Opportunity Sites:

- 5. Quarry
- 7. Fullerton

Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy

Nodes

Node #1 — Belair Edison

At the intersection of Belair Road and Erdman Avenue, this area is known for its Main Street-style development, with lines of neighborhood-serving businesses in converted rowhomes, tree-lined streetscape with mostly adequate pedestrian facilities (sidewalks and crosswalks), and on-street parking. It is proximate to nearby amenities like Clifton and Herring Run Parks. It also has a strong community fabric led by the Belair-Edison Community Association, Belair Edison Neighborhoods, Inc., and Belair Edison Main Street.

Recommendations

Capitalizing on existing Main Street-like land patterns is the primary theme for this node.

Specific considerations include:

- Improving the walkable environment
- Retaining on-street parking
- Creating nearby off-street public parking facilities to minimize the parking requirements for future redevelopment
- Encouraging “arrival on foot” to local businesses along Belair Road



3300 block of Belair Rd near Erdman Ave.



Node #2 — Gardenville

This node exists at the intersection of Belair Road and Frankford Avenue with nearby anchors: Gardenville Elementary School, and St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church. It is highly visible and accessible and considered by many to be the center of the Gardenville Business District. The shopping center at the northeast corner of the node is occupied and recently renovated, implying that any significant redevelopment at this location is still years away. With a band of rowhouses and pedestrian infrastructure on the western edge and a shopping center surrounded by abundant surface parking to the east, the physical identity of this node as either a walkable center or an auto-oriented cluster is difficult to define.

Recommendations

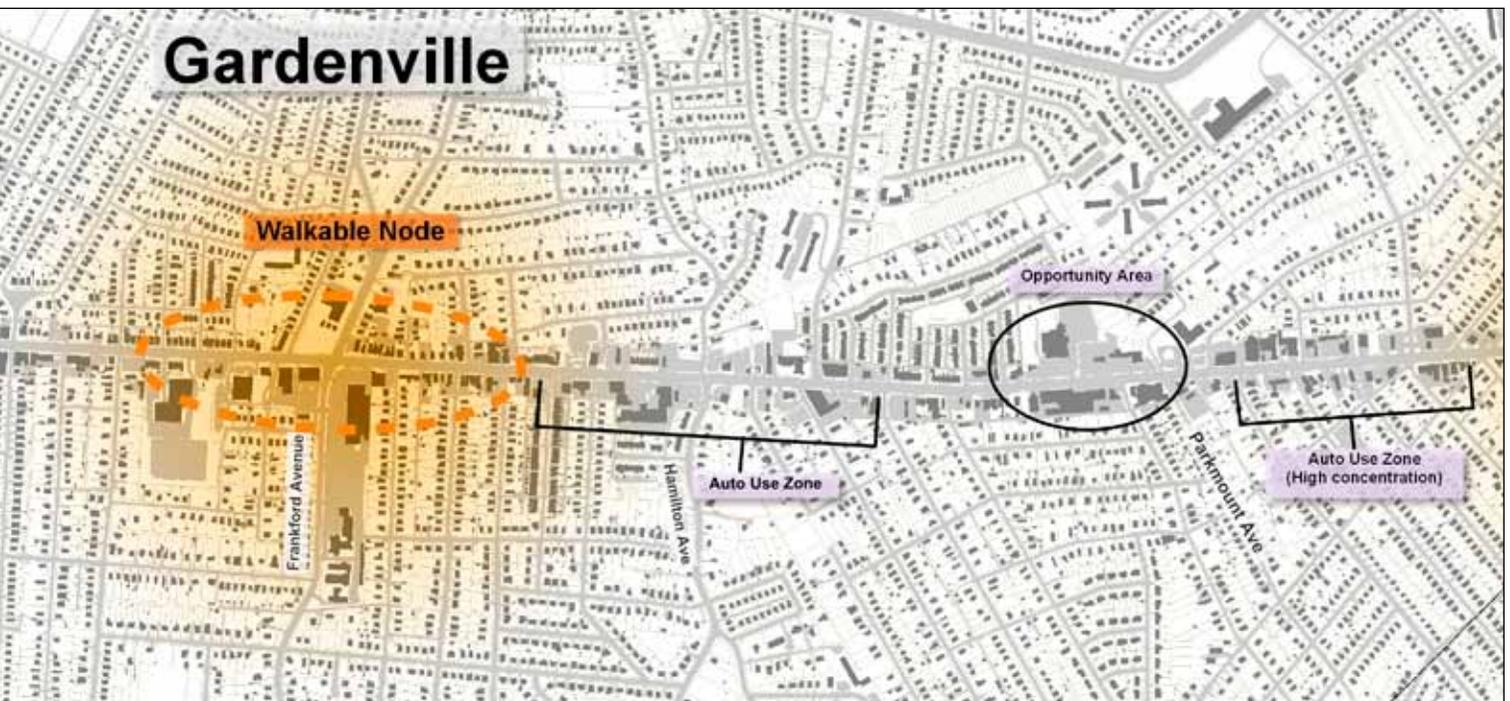
Gardenville has the potential to complement and share trade areas with the Hamilton Business District located on Harford Road.

Specific considerations for this node include:

- Strengthening east-west connections between the two corridors to foster an economic richness of small-scale, personal establishments that offer unique goods and services
- Attracting draw youth-friendly and family-oriented businesses and eateries to the area by capitalizing on the presence of strong anchors like Gardenville Elementary School and St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church.



5400 block of Belair Rd at Frankford Ave.



Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy

Nodes

Node #3 — Overlea

This node stretches along Belair Road from Fleetwood Avenue to Kenwood Avenue. Already a walkable node, preservation and up-keep of existing assets was of utmost concern.

Recommendations

Specific considerations include:

- Setting a distinct identity and branding opportunity to the node that pulls from the Natural History Society of Maryland, strong cultural anchor
- Transforming the museum's parking lot into a long-term development opportunity to provide a revenue stream for the museum and its operations as well as serve the community with new and modern uses



6900 block of Belair Rd at Overlea Ave.



All Nodes

Collectively, the broad vision for all three nodes is to preserve existing assets and build upon these strengths to enhance the neighborhood cluster.

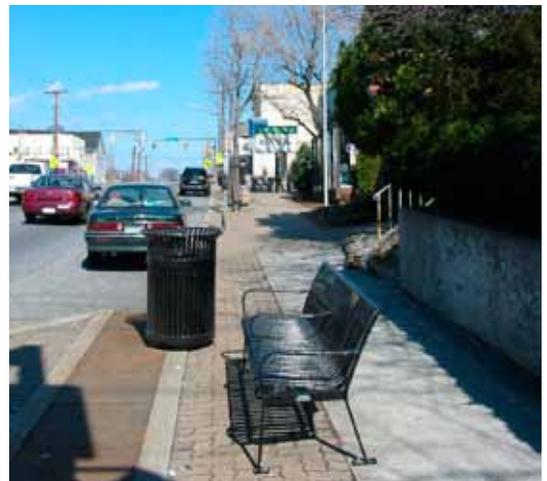
Recommendations

Specific considerations include:

- Beautifying the area and establishing it as a place to “stop and shop” through event programming, installation of lightpole banners, colorful awnings over business entrances, new street furniture, outdoor seating, limited signage, façade improvements, and other branding efforts
- Encouraging improvements through facade improvement and small business loans, creative grants, etc.
- Strengthening nearby neighborhoods through targeted programming by local governments
- Attracting additional small format, neighborhood-oriented uses, where appropriate (e.g., restaurants, coffee shops, deli shop, cleaners, bank, etc.)
- Installing streetscape and façade improvements to commercial properties and create marketing campaigns to attract new patrons to the area



5400 block of Belair Rd at Frankford Ave.



6700 block of Belair Rd approaching Overlea Ave.

Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy

Opportunity Sites

Opportunity Site #1 — Fullerton

The first of two opportunity sites is Belair Road at Fullerton Avenue in Baltimore County. This opportunity site has potential for large-scale redevelopment due to existence of large underdeveloped parcels, consolidated land ownership, and good proximity to Fullerton Elementary School and Recreational Center.

(where there is currently available land) and accentuate this area as an activity center

- Encouraging the design of any new development to have street frontage with parking in the rear or below grade
- Installing modern upgrades to infrastructure such as on-street parking with bump-outs and wider sidewalks (if possible)

Recommendations

Specific considerations include:

- Consider re-orienting existing retail at intersection of Belair Road & Fullerton Avenue and along Fullerton Avenue to embrace community facilities nearby, attracting activity from the school, recreational center, and Belair Road
- Hosting an anchor retail use on the northern edge of Belair Road & Fullerton Avenue



7400 block of Belair Rd at Fullerton Ave.



Opportunity Site #2 — Quarry

The second of the two opportunity sites is the vacant parcel across from the intersection of Belair Road and Powell Avenue near the Bi-Rite Supermarket. Originally a quarry, this was most recently the site of a former auto dealership that currently sits underutilized. The size and layout of the site along with its adjacency to a well-utilized anchor, Bi-Rite Supermarket, makes it a prime candidate for a large-scale, pioneer development. This site could serve as a pilot project to understand the financial, physical, and infrastructural requirements necessary for success.

Recommendations

This site could serve as a pilot project to understand the financial, physical, and infrastructural requirements necessary for success along Belair Road. A proper feasibility analysis should be performed in order to assess the appropriate mix of viable uses for the site.



5900 block of Belair Rd



Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy

Linkages Between Nodes

Establishing strong linkages between nodes that stitch together core centers of activity are just as important as creating vibrant destinations at the various nodes. Currently, an abundance of commercial zoning exists along the corridor, causing an oversaturation of commercial activity and preventing establishments from thriving.

Recommendations

To reposition commercial activity along the Belair Road corridor, the panel recommended:

- Amending zoning and land use regulations to encourage more residential within these “linkage areas” and create an additional critical mass of residents (and consumers) to utilize the goods and services offered by the corridor
- Clustering auto-oriented businesses along Belair Road to create a consumer-friendly, “one-stop shop” environment as well as a concentrated “Automotive Row” between the Quarry site and the Gardenville area (between Berger and Bayonne Avenues). This would create a synergy between related uses to increase patronage.

- Repositioning uses to coincide with the necessary infrastructure improvements and appropriate design and access standards

Transforming the “linkage areas” is a mid-to long-term strategy for the Belair Road Corridor, as many of the existing uses in these areas are still economically profitable. A comprehensive corridor-wide inventory assessment of well-utilized and marginal properties as well as commercial property owner interviews should be performed to understand what areas along Belair Road may be economically ready for transition within the next five to ten years.



6900 block of Belair Rd at Overlea Ave.



Targeted Approaches to Implementation

In addition to the Corridor Revitalization Framework Strategy, the panel developed several targeted approaches to implementation, focusing on various topic areas related to the redevelopment and repositioning of Belair Road. These include:

1. Economic Development Strategies
2. Sense of Place/Branding Strategies
3. Residential Strategies
4. Conceptual Design Strategies
5. Streetscape & Transportation Strategies
6. Infrastructure Improvement Strategies
7. Public Policy Strategies



Precedent Imagery

Targeted Approaches to Implementation

1. Economic Development

A comprehensive real estate and economic development assessment should be considered for the Belair Road corridor to understand the potential for development.

Recommendations

The scope of the assessment should:

- Analyze existing market conditions of housing, retail, office, and mixed-use entertainment
 - Evaluate the current health of business environment along corridor and nearby retail competition
 - Evaluate the community perception of retail environment through consumer-intercept survey
 - Identify areas best suited for redevelopment opportunities in the near-term, mid-term and long-term.
 - Specify the intensity (e.g., square footage of retail/units of housing) and scale of uses for redevelopment
- Identify appropriate niche markets (e.g., senior housing, modern retailers, medical office/wellness centers)
 - Explore existing public incentives that may facilitate economic development potential at nodes and opportunity sites such as Live Baltimore, Baltimore Main Street Program, Small Business Resource Center and Baltimore County commercial revitalization program
 - Investigate the economic and fiscal benefits of development strategies at nodes and opportunity sites
 - Recommend creative strategies for facilitating financing gaps in targeted areas such as tax abatement programs, low-interest or forgivable loan, and enterprise zone or enhancement area incentives



Precedent Imagery



Targeted Approaches to Implementation

2. Sense of Place/Branding

Celebrating the Belair Road corridor as a rich destination north of Downtown Baltimore was paramount among the panel and stakeholders alike. Creating a sense of place at the nodes and opportunity sites, re-establishing the corridor's identity as a premier gateway, and holding frequent community activities for residents, visitors, and business owners are all examples of methods to enliven and revitalize the corridor.

Recommendations

- Establish a corridor theme for Belair Road that describes the future vision of the corridor (e.g., Belair Road in the 21st Century; Belair Road—A New Millennium)
- Endorse active programming and events such as an arts festival, 5k community race, neighborhood cleanup day, community school parades, or summer block party to help market and brand the area
- Install colorful logos, signage and banners at corridor nodes and gateways
- Establish a corridor business district to actively advertise corridor services, enforce property upkeep and clean streets/sidewalks, organize volunteer committees, coordinate with police, and set up civic engagement initiatives such as blogs, websites, newsletters, and social media



Precedent Imagery



Targeted Approaches to Implementation

3. Residential Areas

Given the largely built-out nature of the area's surrounding residential landscape, the panel emphasized the importance of preserving the area's stable residential areas, including its rich diversity of housing, resident makeup (homeowners, renters, families, seniors, etc.), and active community fabric. The strong human capital and longstanding loyalty of Belair Road residents will undoubtedly be central to upholding neighborhood stability and ensuring an optimal quality of life. Neighborhood empowerment activities such as coordinated police patrol, community cleanup, code enforcement, branding improvements, and youth and family activity programming can promote a shared ownership of the area among neighbors and allow residents to capitalize on the various existing community assets.

Recommendations

Along with neighborhood preservation, the panel provided the following insight regarding new housing potential for the corridor:

- As existing commercial uses become obsolete, replace these uses with new housing opportunities in the linkage areas
- Target pockets where parcel sizes and configurations are favorable for new housing
- Diversify housing products and density (e.g., modern rowhomes, low- to mid-rise multifamily units, etc.) to attract a wide variety of users (e.g., families, couples without children, singles, seniors, etc.)
- Accommodate residential communities behind the properties immediately fronting Belair Road through adequate noise and property buffers, appropriate streetscape and street furniture, and adequate pedestrian linkages



Precedent Imagery



Targeted Approaches to Implementation

4. Conceptual Design

An extensive study of the economic development potential of the corridor will prescribe the appropriate size, scale, and intensity of development at the nodes, opportunity sites, and within the linkage areas. Using such information to visually demonstrate potential development scenarios, branding and beautification efforts, and streetscape and sidewalk improvements will provide clear examples to both developers and the relevant public agencies of the type of redevelopment that could thrive along Belair Road.

Recommendations

The panel recommended the following for the corridor:

- Design development scenarios for each node and opportunity site that depicts the scale and size of market potential
- Explore innovative design solutions to physical constraints (narrow lot sizes and varied topography) and the abrupt transition of land use
- Promote site layout designs that allow for co-tenancy and co-locating (clustering) of uses, shared parking, and limited curb cuts
- Incorporate inventive streetscape and site designs along the corridor that naturally combat crime



Precedent Imagery



Targeted Approaches to Implementation

5. Streetscape & Transportation

According to the various stakeholders during the TAP session and observations by the panel during the tour, Belair Road is characterized by the following:

- Mostly undivided, unlimited turns
- Uncoordinated traffic signaling
- Abundant curb cuts that impede traffic flow
- Aging and limited sidewalk and on-street parking infrastructure
- High traffic volumes during peak morning and afternoon hours
- Conditions that facilitate speeding at certain times of the day and stop-and-go traffic at other times of the day
- Fragmented ownership (State Highway Administration regulates Belair Road for Baltimore County; Baltimore City Department of Transportation regulates Belair Road in the city)

Based on the above, the panel approached streetscape and transportation improvements in three ways:



Precedent Imagery

Vehicular

Vital to any redesign of Belair Road should be the commitment to move traffic volumes smoothly and safely along the corridor. To achieve this, the city and county should:

- Install clearly visible striping of all traffic lanes (including bike and parking where appropriate)
- Reduce traffic friction points such as mid-intersection left-hand turns, double parking, and on-street loading for commercial deliveries and shipments
- Coordinate the signalization of the traffic lights to interrupt traffic at appropriate points along the corridor
- Consolidate curb cuts where possible and institute traffic calming measures such as on-street parking
- Install parking bump-outs where appropriate for on-street parking and traffic calming
- Examine the best placement for and type of parking (i.e., shared structured, underground, rear surface lots, on-street) that will coincide favorably with potential redevelopment along Belair Road
- Promote use of the Route 47 MTA Quick Bus as a viable transit alternative for commuters

Pedestrian

To design a more walkable environment from end-to-end, the installation of modern pedestrian facilities is imperative and can further sharpen the appearance of the nodes and opportunity sites by distinguishing these areas from the rest of the corridor. This includes:

- Visible striping for crosswalks
- Coordinated pedestrian light signals
- ADA-compliant sidewalks (at least 5 feet wide)
- Adequate pedestrian lighting
- Streetscape measures such as the installation of street trees, grates, decorative trash bins and benches, and parking lots outlined by landscaped buffers

Wayfinding

For better vehicular and pedestrian navigation along the corridor, the city and county should:

- Redesigning major intersection signage to increase visibility from the road
- Using light pole banners in walkable nodes to identify destination areas
- Instituting signage restrictions to control chaotic, visual clutter
- Standardizing amenity signage for better visual appeal

Collectively, these measures will maximize and uplift the walkable and vehicular experience as one travels the corridor in either direction. The “before and after” images of Belair Road on the following pages further illustrate the significant impacts of such improvements.



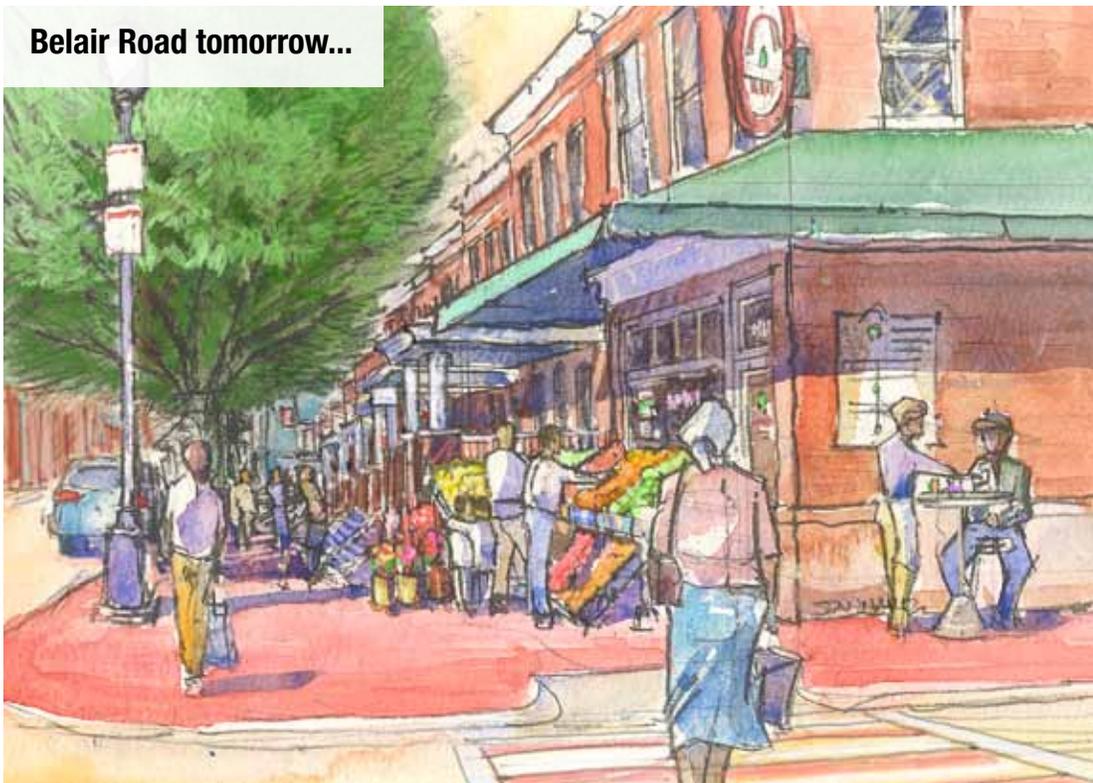
Precedent Imagery

Belair Road today...



Limited street trees, narrow sidewalks, undefined crosswalks. 3700 block of Belair Rd.

Belair Road tomorrow...



Tree-lined streets, wide sidewalks, brick crosswalks and sidewalks

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Belair Road today...



Limited to no landscape buffer surrounding parking lot, minimal street trees, traditional concrete sidewalks. 5400 block of Belair Rd near Frankford Ave.

Belair Road tomorrow...



Defined landscape buffer, mature street trees at equal intervals, brick pedestrian facilities

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Targeted Approaches to Implementation

6. Infrastructure Improvements

As development scenarios are considered or proposed for the nodes and opportunity sites, it is important to understand the impact on infrastructure associated with increased development. The following should occur in preparation of potential redevelopment:

- Identify additional utility requirements necessary for more intense development at each node and opportunity site
- Endorse a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional approach to stormwater management that alleviates the development burden on developers and investors
- Explore creative solutions to meet the incremental infrastructure demands of new development such as developer contributions in lieu of the cost of additional facilities, discounted utility infrastructure costs or relief of traditional infrastructure mandates in lieu of low-impact development strategies such as bioswales, permeable pavement, vegetated roof cover, and rainwater cisterns



Precedent Imagery

Targeted Approaches to Implementation

7. Public Policy

To facilitate and encourage reinvestment in the Belair Road corridor from a regulatory perspective, the strategies below are identified:

- Reevaluate zoning and land use designations along the corridor to allow for more residential uses in the linkage areas and concentrated mixed-use development at the nodes and opportunity sites
- Utilize existing neighborhood enhancement program tools such as Live Baltimore or Small Business Resource Center to encourage investment
- Enforce building codes and design standards to promote recommended use types
- Promote coordination between Baltimore City and Baltimore County to strengthen the impact of corridor-wide public services (e.g., police, fire, trash, utilities, etc.) and polices
- Incentivize developers to utilize environmentally-friendly site and building design measures to alleviate demand on infrastructure



Precedent Imagery



Where to Begin?

In addition to the overall corridor framework and strategies, the panel also outlined the necessary steps to initiate the positive change-over discussed in this report. These include:

Comprehensive Market Analysis: A corridor-wide market analysis is necessary to assess existing housing and commercial conditions, identify the appropriate industry segments for the corridor, prescribe the rates of housing and commercial absorption over the next 10 years, describe the steps needed to attract specific residential, retail, and office users to the Belair Road Corridor, and evaluate how the public sector facilitates the desired and potential change.

Broad Code Enforcement: The enforcement of property upkeep is essential in order to prevent area decline and encourage residents and business owners to maintain their assets for the greater good of the community. Continued widespread accountability by local property owners signifies a vested commitment by the community to ensure their neighborhood is regarded as a “community of choice”. Active code enforcement along Belair Road will prevent pervasive violations and property deterioration.

Proactive Community and Public Sector Investment: Both the community and the public sector must take advantage of opportunities as they arise to implement recommendations provided throughout this report and in subsequent studies. Active engagement with area stakeholders will assist in identifying short-, mid-, and long-term investment opportunities and/or assembling the proper team of individuals to bring ideas to fruition.

Utilization of Existing Public Incentives: Both the city and county have existing incentives related to housing, physical property improve-

ments, job creation, and business improvement that offer monetary and technical assistance and help residents and business owners establish a platform to succeed and invest. Where possible, these incentives should match the appropriate opportunities to leverage area investment.

Land Use Modification: The city and county should reexamine their land patterns and regulatory framework in order to pinpoint areas ripe for rezoning and changes in land use. This will place the corridor at a great advantage when the economy recovers, overall market conditions become strong once again, and the competitive environment regains its momentum.

Readiness for Private Sector Development: If possible, the city and county should prepare for redevelopment potential before momentum for change begins. By allocating resources to reexamine zoning and land use, appraising current infrastructure capacity and project future demand, adjusting traffic signalization, installing traffic calming measures, new street signage, and neighborhood banners, instituting design standards, considering alternatives to stormwater management mandates, and sponsoring corridor events, both jurisdictions can reposition the corridor to readily accommodate development.



5400 block of Belair Rd near Frankford Ave.



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