

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

- **The Baltimore Green Network** promotes urban resiliency through land use equity and connects Baltimore residents to a system of healthy, vibrant, and resilient places.
- **Rooted in the triple bottom-line approach** of Baltimore’s sustainability initiatives (people, prosperity, and environmental sustainability), this plan seeks to transform vacant properties into green community assets. It also connects these spaces to schools, homes, retail districts, and other activity centers.
- **Community benefits of the Baltimore Green Network include:** improved public safety, increased economic growth, a better neighborhood quality of life, and a cleaner and healthier environment.
- **Developed in collaboration with diverse stakeholders**—community members, environmental advocates, government agencies, design and real estate professionals, and urban greening experts—this plan details strategies for the City and community partners to direct resources to the most underinvested neighborhoods, targeted to yield the greatest impact.

INTRODUCTION: THE BENEFITS OF THE BALTIMORE GREEN NETWORK

To increase equity, livability, and resiliency, city leaders and community partners are taking a new approach to open space. Instead of traditional parks and parkways—which are often cut off from neighborhoods and centers of commerce—cities are investing in “green networks,” holistic systems that connect parks and natural resources with safe, accessible routes for both people and wildlife. Green networks enhance a city’s existing assets, while extending the benefits of green space to all residents, and maximizing those benefits to generate overlapping economic, environmental, and health gains.

The Baltimore Green Network envisions green corridors throughout the city, even in highly developed areas.



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A vacant street that could be enhanced to create a cleaner and greener environment.



Baltimore's existing green space is a critical and potent community development resource. Our city boasts more than 2.6 million trees and 6,000 acres of parkland; it is also home to neighborhoods blighted by concentrations of vacant properties, compounding generations-deep economic disparities. By strategically transforming liabilities—like vacant and abandoned properties—into green community assets, and by better connecting all neighborhoods to existing and new green spaces, we can open city-wide access to nature and recreation while supporting the neighborhoods most in need of investment.

The resulting network will provide interconnected benefits:

- **Safer and Healthier Communities**, by eliminating blight, repurposing vacant lots, and connecting more people to green assets, which can improve resident health and mental wellbeing.
- **Enhanced Community Economic Development**, through stabilized land and property values, proposed mechanisms to help maintain neighborhood affordability, as well as the potential to spur job creation.
- **Cleaner and Greener Environment**, including better stormwater management and improved air quality, as well as increased ecosystem resilience and biodiversity (such as support for pollinators like bees and butterflies).

ABOUT THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Baltimore Green Network Vision was established in collaboration with diverse stakeholders. A Department of Planning team worked with external consultants to analyze existing plans and city data, as well as our city's approximately 30,000 vacant buildings and lots. During all planning phases, community input was gathered at small group neighborhood meetings and large public outreach events; hundreds of residents and stakeholders throughout the city provided input into the plan.

A well-maintained green space adds beauty and value in any neighborhood.



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OVERVIEW: THE BALTIMORE GREEN NETWORK VISION

This plan envisions a holistic, city-wide system of nodes and corridors. The Baltimore Green Network will connect our schools, our streams and forests, our parks, our university campuses, and our centers of commerce and employment with corridors that reach every community. This new circulatory system will encourage a greener, healthier, and more equitable city.

Expanding on what is already green in Baltimore, the plan focuses on those neighborhoods where residents have the most to gain from investments in health, safety, economic development, and neighborhood beautification.

TWO BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE BALTIMORE GREEN NETWORK

1) Nodes: Open, green spaces for people and nature to meet.

- **Community Nodes** occur where vacant land densities are highest and redevelopment opportunities are greatest. They center on integrating active recreation and community gathering spaces into the neighborhood fabric. Examples: playgrounds, urban farms, community event spaces.
- **Nature Nodes** are natural spaces with specific ecological functions; these nodes are vital to Baltimore's resilience. Examples: woodlands, restored floodplain forests and wetlands, restored natural shorelines.
- **Anchor Institution & Existing Open Space Nodes** are maintained by the City or private entities, and are important catalysts for economic investment and revitalization; these can be managed for ecological function as well as healthy living. Examples: parks, universities, cemeteries, and even historic sites like Fort McHenry.

2) Corridors: Linear passageways for people and wildlife to travel safely and comfortably.

- **Community Corridors** provide safe and comfortable transit options primarily for people. Greening elements, integrated stormwater management, and pedestrian and bicycle safety features connect the network. The centerpiece of the community corridor network is the proposed 35 mile Baltimore Greenway Trail Network that will connect major parks, diverse neighborhoods, and a host of outdoor resources and amenities.
- **Nature Corridors** are habitat and pathways for native wildlife; protecting and enhancing these will improve ecological function and improve our city's resilience. Preserving and enhancing Baltimore's forest patches and stream valleys provide important stepping stones for wildlife moving through the City's ultra-urban environment.

GREEN NETWORK FOCUS AREAS

To begin putting the Baltimore Green Network into practice at the neighborhood scale (in addition to city-wide), planners worked with community stakeholders to complete neighborhood-specific plans for four initial Focus Areas, each a cluster of two-to-three neighborhoods chosen for high vacancy levels and opportunities for economic development:

1) Central: Druid Heights and Upton; **2) Southwest:** Carrollton Ridge, Boyd-Booth, and Shipley Hill; **3) West:** Harlem Park and Sandtown-Winchester; and **4) East:** Broadway East and South Clifton Park.

These Focus Area Plans were developed in collaboration with local stakeholders. Each plan identifies pilot projects that can spur new investment in neighborhood stabilization and renewal; the Department of Planning has identified initial capital funding for select pilot projects and has begun to work with communities and partners to move them forward. These projects can demonstrate the impact of the Baltimore Green Network—catalyzing further investments.

In all four Focus Areas, residents broadly shared two major concerns: First, that new green improvements would be well maintained, and second, that new development opportunities would be incorporated with plans for long-term greening. The Baltimore Green Network will address these concerns by ensuring that all vacant land is maintained, and includes two short-term strategies for lot maintenance:

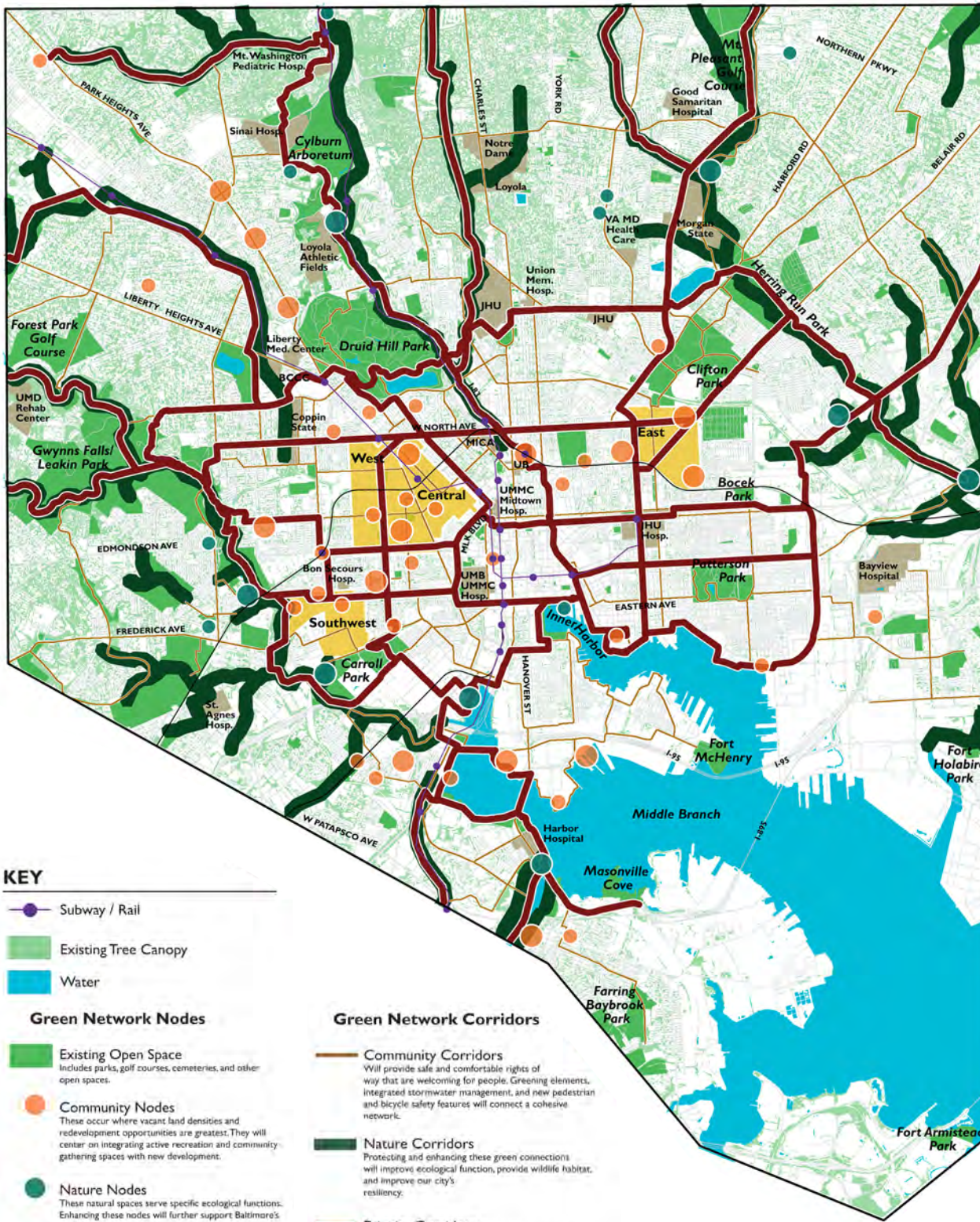
- **Clean and Green Lots:** Vacant properties in each Focus Area will be prioritized for maintenance, greening, and demolition undertaken by City agencies and other partners.
- **Care-a-Lot:** Expanding community capacity to maintain properties in Focus Area neighborhoods, through programs like BMore Beautiful, will help keep green spaces attractive.

Playgrounds can support residential development as well as parks.



Baltimore Green Network Vision Plan

A vision of what could be.



KEY

- Subway / Rail
- Existing Tree Canopy
- Water

Green Network Nodes

- Existing Open Space
Includes parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and other open spaces.
- Community Nodes
These occur where vacant land densities and redevelopment opportunities are greatest. They will center on integrating active recreation and community gathering spaces with new development.
- Nature Nodes
These natural spaces serve specific ecological functions. Enhancing these nodes will further support Baltimore's resilience.
- Anchor Institutions
These important catalysts for economic investment and revitalization can help support a healthier environment and more vibrant, connected communities.
- Focus Areas
Community planning work sessions were conducted in four initial Focus Areas – East, Central, West, and Southwest. Each Focus Area is a cluster of two to three neighborhoods chosen for high levels of vacancies and opportunities for greening and economic development.

Green Network Corridors

- Community Corridors
Will provide safe and comfortable rights of way that are welcoming for people. Greening elements, integrated stormwater management, and new pedestrian and bicycle safety features will connect a cohesive network.
- Nature Corridors
Protecting and enhancing these green connections will improve ecological function, provide wildlife habitat, and improve our city's resiliency.
- Priority Corridors
Nature and/or community corridors with the strongest potential to create a connected network between major parks, institutions, neighborhoods, employment and transportation centers, recreational facilities, and natural assets like forests, green spaces, streams, and the harbor. Priority corridors include a combination of existing facilities, planned facilities, and prospective projects.



These lot-maintenance strategies, identified in the plan as **1) Clean and Green Sites**, seek short-term beautification while holding parcels for long-term development opportunities. Two additional types of strategies are included in each Focus Area Plan: **2) Pilot Projects**, to be developed as part of the Baltimore Green Network; and **3) Future Opportunity Sites**, with high potential for community revitalization that integrates greening elements, pending identification of a developer and financing.

Pilot Project Examples:

- **Druid Square** (Central Focus Area), a new urban square with active open space and a Kaboom! Playground, in a community-identified location that supports adjacent residential development.
- **Harlem Park Inner Block Parks** (West), distinctive green spaces in the neighborhood, to be opened up through selective demolition, and connected to the West Baltimore exercise trail.
- **The Racheal Wilson Firefighter Memorial** (Southwest), a small neighborhood park honoring a local first responder, to include a play area, a community gathering space, and flower beds.
- **Hoffman Street Green Space** (East), a proposed linear green next to Collington Square Park, to combine existing parcels and provide a green connection to the Baltimore Food Hub.

Well-designed green spaces can be attractive and functional as gathering spots and stormwater management sites.



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NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In the immediate term, the Department of Planning, Office of Sustainability is leading implementation, with the support of existing City capital and operational resources. Phase-one efforts will focus on:

- Creating new green spaces, community gardens, streetscapes, parks, and or development parcels identified in the Focus Area Plans and those to be completed in the future.
- Implementing higher standards for greening and maintenance of vacant lots.
- Identifying resources to increase support for existing community-managed green spaces.
- Enhancing identified corridors—through a combination of improved walking and bicycling facilities, streetscape greening and improvements, and wayfinding.
- Extending, connecting, or improving existing trails, and improving access between neighborhoods and parks through bicycle and walking paths and enhanced street crossings.
- Enhancing or protecting existing natural resource assets (such as scattered forest patches) that are not under the jurisdiction of the Department of Recreation and Parks.
- Enhancing existing natural ecological systems such as stream valleys, wetlands, or forests.

The Department of Planning will also establish operational infrastructure for further recommendations:

Recommendations for Process & Policy:

1. **Ensure neighborhoods where new green amenities are developed remain affordable** for all income levels.
2. **Address short-term operational bottlenecks.** An inter-agency working group should speed implementation through improving permitting processes and enhancing water access for community managed open spaces.
3. **Establish a robust green space workforce development program.** This is vital; areas of the city with the highest numbers of vacant lots also tend to have the highest rates of unemployment.

Recommendations for Communication & Engagement:

1. **Ensure inclusive outreach.** Develop consistent engagement guidelines, and extend outreach beyond traditional meetings (i.e., include door-to-door canvassing and targeted advertising).
2. **Conduct a variety of engagement activities in multiple, accessible locations.** Accommodate diverse schedules, and offer creative formats (i.e., “office hours” in vacant retail spaces).

- 3. Enhance stakeholder partnerships.** Maintain strong collaboration with City and external partners for ongoing Baltimore Green Network Implementation.

Recommendations for Land, Open Space, & Natural Resource Management:

- 1. Follow best practices for resource management.** Support the Department of Recreation and Parks in the creation of a master plan for restoration and management.
- 2. Design to reflect Baltimore's unique natural character.** Collaborate with residents to design green spaces that reflect community aesthetics and promote neighborhood stewardship.

Recommendations for Funding Sources & Finance Strategies:

- 1. Elevate the Baltimore Green Network as a priority for City and other funding,** ensuring pilot projects are implemented and maintenance needs are met.
- 2. Leverage existing agency initiatives and mandates.** For example, continue to partner with the Department of Housing and Community Development on prioritizing demolition to optimize resources in support of Green Network goals and projects.
- 3. Perform a feasibility study and create a long-term funding strategy.** Explore the use of voter, administrative, or legislature-approved funding; tax increment funding (TIF); and other tools.

Cycle tracks can allow anyone to reach green spaces safely.



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INTEGRATING WITH EXISTING CITY PRIORITIES

The Baltimore Green Network is one component of the City's Sustainability Plan, which advocates for a holistic approach to improving quality of life for today's residents and for future generations. The Sustainability Plan extends beyond City-agency jurisdiction, and requires committed stakeholders and proactive public-private partnerships at multiple levels to achieve its ambitious goals.

The Baltimore Green Network also integrates extremely well into existing City priorities:

- **Aligning infrastructure investments with communities in need.** For example, as the Department of Public Works fulfills stormwater management mandates, the Baltimore Green Network can direct necessary projects to neighborhoods that lack green amenities.
- **Promoting community and workforce development.** Creating new green spaces while removing blight can give property owners and developers the confidence essential to a community development strategy. Deconstruction, green space construction, and maintenance can provide residents with jobs, skills, and pathways to a living wage and entrepreneurship.
- **Linking residents to corridors and green amenities through improved pathways.** The Community Corridors in the Baltimore Green Network Plan dovetail with those of the City's adopted Bicycle Master Plan. The network also supports the 21st Century Schools Initiative, by improving pedestrian safety and greening in proximity to INSPIRE schools.

The green network improves quality of life for the community.



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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Green Network Vision is not an isolated plan. It is part of an ambitious web of efforts already underway—the City of Baltimore, public and private partners, and community members are working hard to develop our economy, protect our ecology, and improve our quality of life.

These existing efforts are analogous to the nodes of the Baltimore Green Network. And in the same way, the Green Network Vision is analogous to the corridors: It is a strategy to connect and strengthen what’s already working in Baltimore, and to align these efforts in focusing on the neighborhoods where the greatest change is possible.

The resulting network will be greater than the sum of its parts. Achieving this ambitious vision will require a commitment to collaboration and investment for the long term. Countering the effects of decades of disparity and disinvestment will not happen overnight.

Yet behind this large-scale, long-term perspective, there is even greater potential that will be felt at the local level. For members of our community who have seen their neighborhoods suffer from blight and illegal activity, even the first pilot projects of implementing the Baltimore Green Network will create tangible change. From sports fields and playgrounds to wildflower gardens and forest patches to shady, tree-lined sidewalks and a connected network of trails, the green spaces that replace former blighted properties will open new channels of access, beauty, and social connection, creating benefits we can’t predict. This is a long-term journey, but one in which every step makes a difference.