



Robert W. Coleman Elementary School INSPIRE Recommendation Report



September 2021



Table of Contents

Overview: 21st Century and INSPIRE	3
Recommendation Development and Next Steps	4
INSPIRE Area Map	5
Preparing for School Opening Day: Primary Walking Routes and Improvements	6
Recommendations	
Invest in Housing and Market-Strengthening Development Opportunities	7
Strengthen Transportation Connections and Access	11
Enhance the Appearance and Marketability of the Community	13

For feedback on this draft contact:

Chad Hayes (Western District Planner) at 410-396-3958 or chad.hayes@baltimorecity.gov

Cover image credits: RRMM Lukmire Architects (Robert W. Coleman Elementary School), Baltimore City Department of Planning (Herbert Street Community Park), Baltimore City Department of Planning (housing), Baltimore City Department of Planning (Brooks Robinson Field at Frederick Douglass High School), Baltimore City Department of Planning (Wisdom Wall), Baltimore City Department of Planning (Coppin State University)

Overview: 21st Century and INSPIRE

The 21st Century School Buildings Program

The 21st Century School Buildings Program will support excellence in teaching and learning with flexible and adaptable space, learning areas designed for interaction and collaboration, and technology-equipped classrooms, enabling students to meet today's—and tomorrow's—high standards, and will provide communities with a shared public resource that will enrich their neighborhoods. Baltimore City will benefit from this historic effort to provide the healthy, safe, efficient, and modern school buildings all children deserve. As a result, students in Baltimore City Public Schools will benefit from:

- Replaced or renovated school buildings across the city;
- School environments that support teaching and learning to prepare students for college and career success;
- Schools that become hubs of resources supporting entire communities;
- Modern, efficient, and inspiring educational facilities that also provide recreation and community use; and
- Partnerships that encourage businesses and neighborhood residents to connect with their local schools.

INSPIRE Mission and Objectives

Each modernized 21st Century school represents tens of millions of dollars of public investment into the neighborhood it serves. To leverage this investment, the Department of Planning (DOP) launched the INSPIRE program, which stands for Investing in Neighborhoods and Schools to Promote Improvement, Revitalization, and Excellence. This planning program focuses on the neighborhoods surrounding each of the schools, specifically the quarter-mile around the schools.

INSPIRE focuses on the quarter-mile area surrounding each 21st Century school in order to build from the school investment. Plans include recommendations for improvements that affect residents' quality of life.

- Immediate City investments make streetscape improvements (better sidewalks, crosswalks, street streets, etc.) on “primary walking routes” to help ensure that there is safer pedestrian access to the school.
- Plan recommendations are organized into goals related to the housing market; transportation; and community marketing.

Recommendation Development and Next Steps

The Department of Planning staff has worked with members of the school and neighborhood communities to better understand their neighborhood experiences, concerns, and needs.

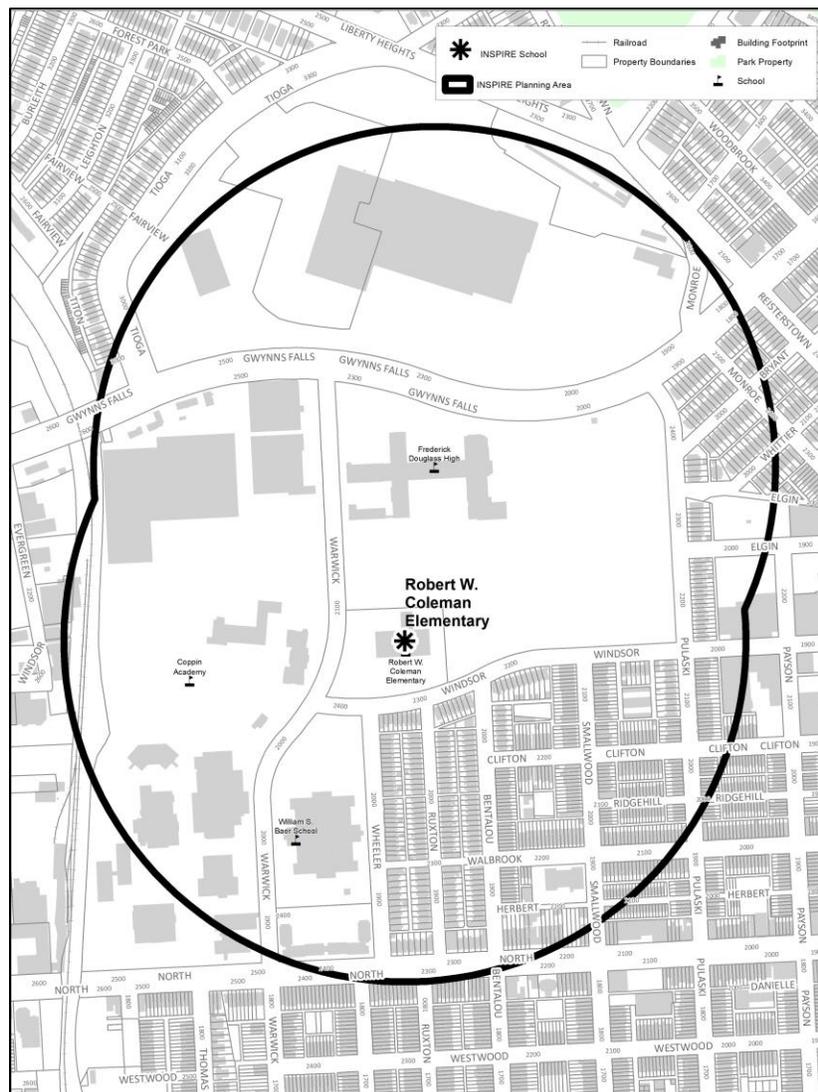
- Stakeholders helped inform the following draft recommendations through various engagements including INSPIRE meetings; steering committee meetings; surveys; PTO meetings; neighborhood association meetings; and more.
- Recommendations from previous neighborhood, school, and City plans and assessments were reviewed and included where appropriate.
- Residents, nonprofits, advocates, and others are already leading many efforts. In many cases, INSPIRE recommendations will build on what's already happening; the final plan will include highlights of recent successes and efforts underway.

Next Steps

DOP staff will seek and incorporate neighborhood and City agency feedback to these draft recommendations. Staff will finalize recommendations and develop the INSPIRE plan followed by a presentation to the Planning Commission for plan adoption. DOP staff will work with community members to identify community projects that can be worked on together.

INSPIRE Area Map

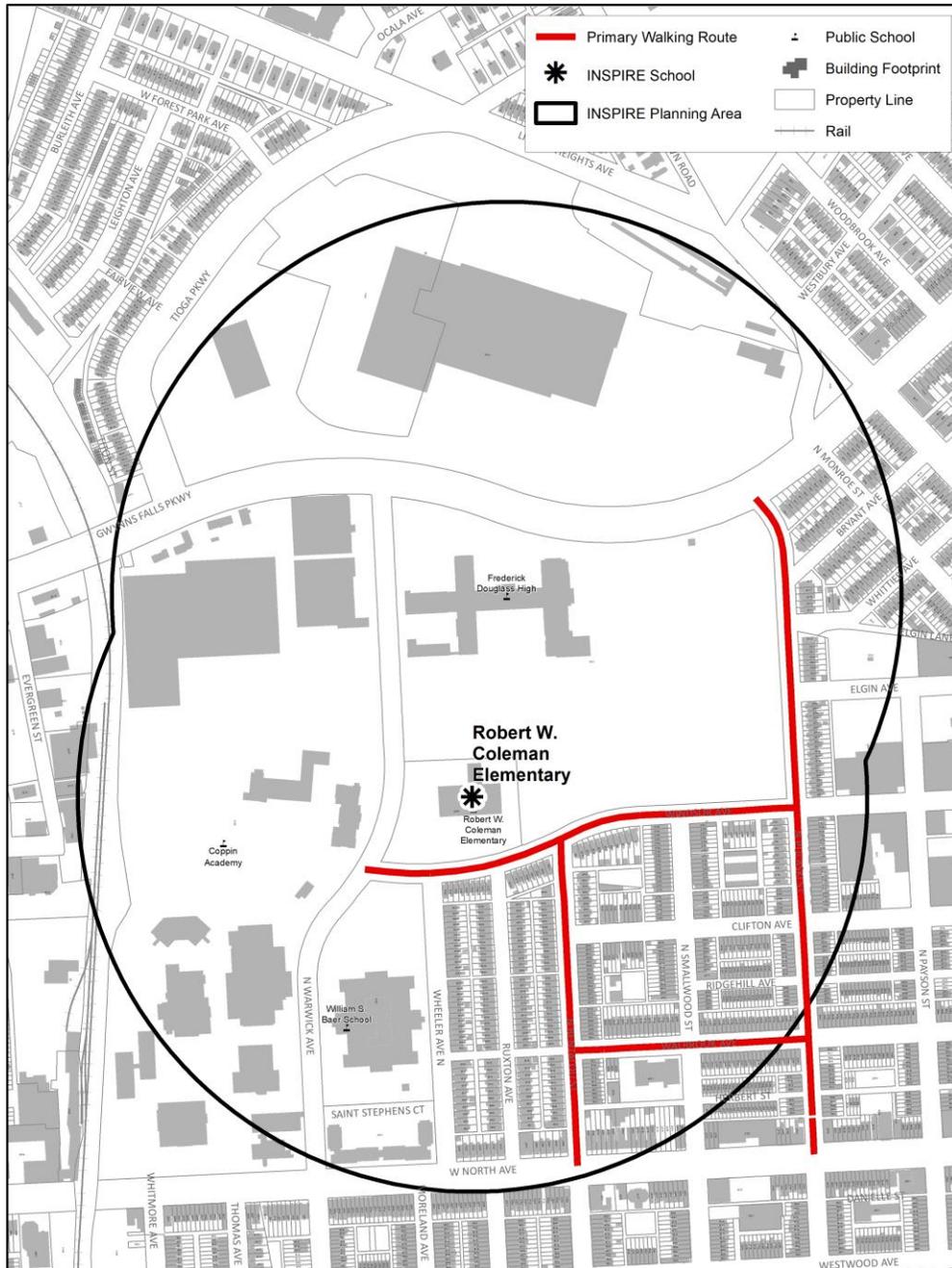
Robert W. Coleman Elementary School (2400 Windsor Avenue), a community school, is located in the Mondawmin neighborhood statistical area. The school campus is bordered by the Frederick Douglass High School and Joseph C. Briscoe Academy (2301 Gwynns Falls Parkway) campus to the north and east. Given the close proximity of the schools, the INSPIRE planning area focused on the quarter-mile around both campuses. The INSPIRE planning area consists of multiple uses including residential, commercial, educational, and light industrial. Coppin State University is located immediately west of Robert W. Coleman Elementary and William S. Baer School is immediately south at 2001 N. Warwick Avenue. Mondawmin Mall is located to the far north of the INSPIRE planning area and smaller commercial uses can be found to the far south along W. North Avenue. Some light industrial uses are located to the east along N. Payson Street. A large portion of the planning area is residential, consisting mostly of beautiful single-family townhomes with large front porches facing the street. There are a few apartment complexes including Coleman Manor Apartments (2201 Walbrook Avenue) and Saint Stephen's Courts Apartments (2401 Saint Stephens Street).



Preparing for School Opening Day: Primary Walking Routes and Improvements

The map below identifies the primary routes students walk to get to and from school. The Department of Planning used BCPS student/school zone data and worked with community members; school staff, parents, and students; and the Department of Transportation to identify the routes.

These are the blocks prioritized for streetscape improvements including bringing sidewalks up to a safe and standard condition, repainting or adding crosswalks, and pruning and planting street trees.



INVEST IN HOUSING AND MARKET-STRENGTHENING DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Address vacancy, build confidence in the local housing market, and connect residents to homeownership assistance programs.

Create and Maintain High-Quality Owner-Occupied Housing

1. Promote homeownership assistance programs to help current and future owners maintain and improve their homes.

Many homeowners could benefit from home improvements that create safer, healthier, and more energy efficient homes. Existing and future homeowners should be connected with programs available through Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) Green, Healthy and Sustainable Homes division at community association meetings, community events, and through the school.

2. Reduce the number of vacant buildings near the school.

The area immediately south of the school along Windsor Avenue, Wheeler Avenue, and Ruxton Avenue has the fewest number of vacant buildings within the planning area. In addition, this section has a high percentage of well-maintained, owner-occupied homes. The Department of Planning and the Baltimore DHCD should build on this strength by targeting the existing buildings with active Vacant Building Notices. Different strategies including increased code enforcement, receivership, or acquisition should be explored to expedite the renovation and occupancy of the vacant buildings near the school.

3. Implement strategic stabilizations to preserve buildings with renovation potential.

Several homes in the planning area have tremendous rehabilitation potential but have a high renovation cost given their current condition. One major cost associated with renovating a home is the roof, which must be structurally sound before interior renovation can begin. A rowhome with a missing roof is not only expensive to renovate but it can also negatively impact the neighboring homes due to water infiltration. Stabilizing these homes can help attract investors and will help protect the neighboring buildings. Baltimore DHCD should identify locations in the INSPIRE planning area where the department can use their very limited stabilization funds to stabilize homes that are not currently financially feasible to renovate.

Leverage Investments Like North Avenue Rising and the E.M.A.G.E. Center to Further Revitalize West North Avenue and the Surrounding Blocks

4. Transfer vacant privately-owned buildings on West North Avenue to motivated, community-engaged developers to renovate and market.

Historic West North Avenue is not only a major thoroughfare but it's also the border for a number of West Baltimore neighborhoods. Unfortunately, many of the beautiful two- and three-story rowhomes that line West North Avenue are threatened due to vacancy. Without owners to maintain them, many of the structures have

deteriorated through the years and some have been lost to demolition. However, West North Avenue has experienced significant public and private investment in recent years that has created interest in many of the vacant homes. With this renewed energy on West North Avenue there is a great opportunity to transfer ownership of the vacant buildings via receivership to developers that have the resources to renovate and occupy them.

5. Complete acquisition of the vacant lots on the 2100 block of Herbert Street.

The 2100 block of Herbert Street is immediately north of West North Avenue, behind the new E.M.A.G.E. Center (2132 W. North Avenue). All of the homes on this block were demolished several years ago. Thanks to a partnership between the Parks and People Foundation, the Robert W. Coleman Community Organization, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Baltimore DHCD, the resulting vacant lots on this block were converted to high quality green space. A majority of the lots used to create this new green asset are owned by the Baltimore DHCD. The remaining privately-owned lots should be acquired to complete the site assembly.

6. Coordinate with community stakeholders to determine a permanent use for the land on the 2100 block of Herbert Street.

The new green space on the 2100 block of Herbert Street was created as a temporary measure while the site assembly is being completed. When the remaining privately-owned parcels are acquired the Department of Planning and Baltimore DHCD should coordinate with community stakeholders to determine the preferred permanent use for the block. Given the popularity of the green space it may be determined to keep the site, or a portion of it, as green space but further outreach is needed to determine the appropriate next steps.

Strategically Renovate Blocks for Whole-Block Outcomes

7. Identify investors for vacant clusters on stable blocks.

Many of the blocks in the planning area are stable with high rates of owner-occupied homes. However, there are several blocks that suffer from small clusters of vacant buildings. Overall, these blocks don't necessarily have high concentrations of vacancy but the existing vacant clusters threaten the stability of the remaining block. These threats could be diminished with a relatively minor intervention such as targeted receivership and marketing to trusted investors. Some potential locations include:

- 1900 block of N. Bentalou Street (west side)
- 2000 block of N. Bentalou Street (east side)
- 2100 block of N. Smallwood Street (west side)

8. Develop a housing strategy with residents for the square block bounded by N. Smallwood Street, Clifton Avenue, N. Pulaski Street, and Walbrook Avenue.

One of the most challenged blocks in the planning area is the square block bounded by N. Smallwood Street to the west, Clifton Avenue to the north, N. Pulaski Street to the east, and Walbrook Avenue to the south. This square block is mostly intact with quality housing stock, but the rate of vacancy is very high. A proactive housing strategy with significant financial resources will be necessary to stabilize the housing stock in this area. The

Department of Planning, Baltimore DHCD, and the Greater Mondawmin Coordinating Council should coordinate with residents and potential investors to determine the appropriate strategy for each of the vacant buildings within the footprint.

Promote Programs to Help Current and Future Homeowners Buy, Keep, Maintain, and Improve Their Homes

9. Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore (NHS) should market their housing counseling services to prepare renters to purchase a home in the community and prevent existing homeowners from losing their home to mortgage foreclosure.

The Robert W. Coleman community has so many assets that attract residents to make the neighborhood their home. Many of the residents living in the community are currently renting the home that they live in. Residents that would prefer to own instead of rent should take advantage of a housing counseling service to prepare them to purchase a home in the neighborhood. A HUD-certified housing counseling agency not only provides homebuying workshops but a housing counseling certificate could also open the door for closing cost assistance for first time homebuyers. In addition, current homeowners experiencing difficulty paying their monthly mortgage could benefit from foreclosure prevention counseling.

NHS is a HUD-certified counseling agency with a strategic goal to promote financial wellness and homeownership among renters in the Greater Mondawmin neighborhoods, including Robert W. Coleman. At NHS, Robert W. Coleman residents can access financial coaching services to stabilize their credit scores and savings prior to the homebuying process. They can then move into NHS' homeownership counseling program, which will help them learn the ins and outs of purchasing and owning a home, as well as open the door to various homebuying incentives. NHS also offers a special down payment assistance incentive for buyers who want to purchase and occupy homes in the Greater Mondawmin neighborhoods.

10. Market home improvement loans to homeowners interested in completing home renovation projects.

Many home improvement projects, like finishing a basement or modernizing a kitchen, can improve the value of the home, can expand the total living area, and make the home more enjoyable to live in. However, financing home improvement projects can sometimes be a challenge. Homeowners living in the INSPIRE planning area seeking a home improvement loan have multiple options available to them. Both Healthy Neighborhoods, Inc. and Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore should market their home improvement loans to the blocks within the INSPIRE planning area so that homeowners can compare some of the loan options available to them.

11. Connect homeowners to the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service to make sure they have the legal documentation necessary to properly transfer ownership of their property upon their passing.

A home is often someone's greatest financial asset and the backbone of a wealth-building strategy. Protecting that asset and being able to pass it on through a legal document in the event of the owner's death is critical. Being on the property's deed is also required for many home assistance programs. The "My Home, My Deed, My Legacy" initiative is operated by Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service, the Maryland Department of Housing and

Community Development, and Baltimore DHCD. Organizations and schools can request information or speakers for community meetings and events.

12. Access funding for block improvement projects through Healthy Neighborhoods, Inc., as funding allows.

As a designated Healthy Neighborhood, target blocks within the Greater Mondawmin area have the opportunity to secure funding to implement block projects. The type of project can range in scope but they typically enhance the appearance of the applicable block and culminate with a celebratory block party. Block projects not only enhance curb appeal but more importantly, they bring residents together to accomplish a goal with the ultimate goal of strengthening social connections. Leaders on designated target blocks should collaborate with neighbors to identify a potential block project and then apply to the Greater Mondawmin Coordinating Council affiliate association/Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore for implementation funding.

13. Market the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development Division of Homeownership and Housing Preservation's resources.

The Baltimore DHCD has several programs designed to help Baltimore City homeowners. In particular, the Division of Homeownership and Housing Preservation offers rehabilitation services, home improvement incentives, lead hazard reduction grants, and energy conservation incentives. Additional opportunities to promote these programs to existing homeowners should be explored.

STRENGTHEN TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS AND ACCESS

Connect students and residents safely and efficiently to the places they need and want to go.

Improve Street Infrastructure, Traffic Conditions, Pedestrian Safety, and Walkability

14. Slow traffic by introducing additional intersection stop signs.

Streets with long stretches between traffic stops allow drivers to accelerate and reach high speeds. This creates dangerous conditions and is not suitable for pedestrians or for residents living on the streets where speeding is a recurring challenge. There are several intersections in the INSPIRE planning area that could benefit from all-way stops by installing stop signs for streets that are not currently required to stop. The Department of Transportation should investigate the intersections that could benefit from all-way stops. Some potential locations include:

- N. Bentalou Street & Walbrook Avenue
- N. Bentalou Street & Clifton Avenue
- N. Pulaski Street & Walbrook Avenue

15. Install additional speed humps in front of the school on Windsor Avenue between N. Warwick Avenue and N. Pulaski Street.

Robert W. Coleman Elementary School, a community school, is located on the 2400 block of Windsor Avenue. Residents and stakeholders have expressed concerns about high traffic speeds on Windsor Avenue between N. Warwick Avenue and N. Pulaski Street. There are currently two speed humps on this stretch of Windsor Avenue that help to slow down vehicles but there may be an opportunity to install additional speed humps. The Department of Transportation should evaluate the potential to install additional speed humps on Windsor Avenue to reduce the speed of vehicles driving in front of the school.

16. Install covered bus shelters at existing bus stops.

Many of the MTA bus stops in the INSPIRE planning area do not include covered bus shelters. When there is inclement weather or on hot, sunny days, MTA riders waiting for the bus are not protected from the elements. MTA should explore areas where the sidewalk is wide enough to install covered bus shelters. Some potential locations include:

- West side of the 2400 block of N. Pulaski Street (northeast section of Frederick Douglass High School property near the football field)
- West side of the 2100 block of N. Warwick Avenue
- West side of the 2300 block of N. Warwick Avenue
- South side of the 2200 block of Gwynns Falls Parkway in front of Frederick Douglass High School

17. Evaluate the potential for new dedicated left turn lanes on Gwynns Falls Parkway at signalized intersections that don't currently have protected turn lanes.

During the INSPIRE planning process stakeholders expressed concerns about ongoing challenges with traffic accidents on Gwynns Falls Parkway. One potential cause for vehicular accidents is that some of the signalized intersections do not have a protected turning lane. This forces vehicles that are making left turns to stop in the traffic lane while they are waiting to turn. Traffic lanes that are stopped and backed up create potential vehicular conflicts that could be minimized if protected turn lanes were installed. The Department of Transportation should assess the effectiveness of the existing protected turn lanes on Gwynns Falls Parkway and determine if other signalized intersections could benefit from new protected turn lanes.

18. Develop safe walking routes through the community to existing recreation assets like Parkview Recreation Center, Cloverdale Basketball Courts, and Druid Hill Park.

The Robert W. Coleman Community is in close proximity to several parks and recreation assets. The distance between the school and Parkview Recreation Center is .7 miles. Druid Hill Park and Cloverdale Basketball Courts are .9 miles away. While these may be walkable distances for many, there are several barriers that make the walk challenging. The Department of Transportation should identify walking routes that connect the Robert W. Coleman Community to parks and recreation assets and make key enhancements, such as sidewalk replacement and installation of pedestrian countdown signals, to improve pedestrian safety.

ENHANCE THE APPEARANCE AND MARKETABILITY OF THE COMMUNITY

Build a neighborhood brand that helps promote the strength of the community

Maintain Existing Green Space

19. Apply for beautification grants to help maintain the high-quality green space on the 2100 block of Herbert Street.

The 2100 block of Herbert Street is a well-maintained green space that is highly utilized by residents and visitors. Maintenance will continue to be a priority so that this block remains an asset for the community. In addition, there may be opportunities for further green space enhancements for this block. The Greater Mondawmin Coordinating Council should consider future grant opportunities if necessary to keep the block maintained while determinations about permanent uses for that space are made.

20. Seek funding opportunities to further enhance “The Quiet Place” at block #3213 lot #045B (bounded by Clifton Avenue, N. Smallwood Street, Walbrook Avenue, and N. Bentalou Street).

The Quiet Place is one of the many hidden gems in the Robert W. Coleman community. Tucked behind the 2000 blocks of N. Bentalou Street and N. Smallwood Street and the 2200 blocks of Clifton Avenue, and Walbrook Avenue, the once unimproved vacant lot was converted to a quaint community park featuring a garden and a mural. Potential funding sources for further park enhancements include the Chesapeake Bay Trust, AARP Livable Community, Baltimore Office of Promotion and Arts, Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore, and the Baltimore Community Foundation.

Pursue Neighborhood Marketing and Branding Opportunities

21. Partner with the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts to explore opportunities for potential art installations in the community.

The Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts (BOPA) helps to create more vibrant neighborhoods by connecting communities and artists as well as providing financial resources through programs like the Public Art Program, Baltimore Mural Program, and Community Arts Grants. The Department of Planning should connect BOPA with the Robert W. Coleman community to determine if there is an interest for additional art installations in the neighborhood.

22. Install new, highly visible community signs at Windsor & N. Warwick and Windsor & N. Pulaski that identify the Robert W. Coleman community.

There are several prominent intersections within the Robert W. Coleman neighborhood that provide an opportunity to help identify the community. Two highly visible intersections are Windsor Avenue & N. Warwick Avenue and Windsor Avenue & N. Pulaski Street. Several years ago, the Robert W. Coleman Community Organization installed community signs at those locations to welcome residents and visitors. The Department of

Planning should work with the Robert W. Coleman Community Organization to determine if those signs should be updated, or potentially replaced with new signs.

23. Identify potential resident marketers to be Live Baltimore Neighborhood Ambassadors.

Live Baltimore is a non-profit organization with a mission to recruit and retain Baltimore City residents. Live Baltimore helps to market Baltimore's neighborhoods to potential homebuyers and helps connect them to neighborhoods that they are interested in. One way that Live Baltimore helps to make these connections is through their list of neighborhood ambassadors. Neighborhood ambassadors help to answer questions that potential buyers may have and help to promote the neighborhood's assets. A neighborhood's best marketers should be the residents that live there and so interested residents should register with Live Baltimore to be neighborhood ambassadors for the Robert W. Coleman community.

24. The neighborhood organizations, schools, and other stakeholders should work together to develop and implement marketing strategies.

The Robert W. Coleman community is wonderfully unique and has so many incredible assets. In addition, the community is served by several organizations including the Robert W. Coleman Community Organization, the Greater Mondawmin Coordinating Council, and Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore that can help promote and market the neighborhood to potential homebuyers. To build on the existing marketing efforts, the existing partners could request that Live Baltimore join them to convene a neighborhood marketing workshop to talk about different strategies, lessons, and activities. Follow-up could include forming marketing committees to further explore identifying target populations, talking with real estate professionals, and to develop actionable marketing strategies and materials.

25. Organize an annual broker event at the school with real estate agents.

Real Estate Agents can play a big role in a local housing market. They help their clients/potential buyers determine which homes and neighborhoods to explore during the selection process. Real Estate Agents can be great community marketers depending on how informed they are about a given neighborhood. Given that schools are a major determinant for families searching for a home to buy, Robert W. Coleman Elementary School is the ideal location to host an annual event for Real Estate Agents to learn about all of the great assets that the Robert W. Coleman community has to offer.

26. Create a welcome packet for new residents that includes information about the school and nearby amenities.

When residents move to a neighborhood it's important to welcome them and inform them how they can get involved in the community. In addition, residents moving to a new neighborhood may have many questions about the community. Providing a welcome packet to a new neighbor is not only a great way to break the ice but can also provide a resident with answers to questions they may have. The Robert W. Coleman Community Organization should take the lead and assist community leaders with welcome packets that can be handed out to new residents.