

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 29, 2024

Meeting #89

Project: Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, Geographic Sections

Phase: Master Plan I

Location: Downtown Baltimore

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Planning Director Chris Ryer introduced the Comprehensive Plan and the process the Planning Department has undertaken over the course of the past few years. The comprehensive plan is mandated by the State of Maryland and is intended to guide physical development of the City over the next ten years and beyond. The plan is based on community input and values, with a focus on topics related to urban planning: land use, transportation, housing, community facilities, and more. Baltimore's plan is divided into four themes: Livable Places, Inclusive Economy, Equitable Access, Healthy Communities.

In addition to the topics within each theme, the plan will also include limited sections devoted to specific geographies, including Downtown, the Impact Investment Areas, Choice Neighborhoods, and other agency focus areas, like the West Baltimore United Project.

In order to gather input and inform the Downtown sections of the Comprehensive Master Plan, the Department of Planning's Urban Design team jointly hosted a public charrette with AIA Baltimore. The event took place at Baltimore's Center for Architecture and Design on January 12, 2024 and lasted for 8 hours.

Because of the need to make large drawings and work in groups, the working portion of the charrette was limited to 75 community and technical experts. Multi-disciplinary groups were organized by Planning Staff to ensure each team had a broad range of input. Staff considered expertise, geography, and opportunity for collaborative critique of ongoing projects. The groups produced materials during a break-out session (drawings and recommendations) for review by the public. Groups conducted SWOT analyses, defined goals, and provided design and policy recommendations during the break-out sessions. Following the break-out session, groups pinned work up and shared their ideas. Each of the nine groups provided a 3-minute overview of their analysis, policy and design recommendations, and big ideas contained in their plans. Following the pin-up, the public were invited to comment on proposed recommendations.

The presentation today includes an overview of the work produced during the charrette, the public responses to the work including comments and voting for ideas that residents liked, or thought would be successful for our shared Downtown. The presentation also includes early analysis by the Urban Design Team. This analysis will inform the chapter of the Comprehensive Master Plan and will guide development for the next 10 years, which is why the Planning Department requested the review. Planning staff feels it is important to invite critical feedback as the Urban Design Team works to produce images and recommendations to guide development.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their thorough presentation and continued with questions and comments. The Panel noted that they welcome this process and stated that the city needs to take on big challenges to achieve impactful results.

Clarifications:

- *What is the ultimate goal of this plan? Who will use it, and how will the Planning Department know if the plan is successful?* The Department wants to have achievable goals, and it will be revisited in 10 years, to see which things have been implemented. An analysis will be useful. Baltimore City is expecting a lot of change in the next 10 years due to a lot of funding and big projects, and the trends of downtowns across the globe. The Department wants to
- *Plan and implementation cycle – what is the final format for this plan?* Within the Comp Plan, there will be a limited amount of space for the Downtown portion of the plan to ensure that it doesn't dominate. However, we are receiving a lot of good feedback and
- *Where does the project sit in relation to public versus privately-owned land? Would a private development project be expected to adhere to the plan? Is it regulation or simply big ideas?* As an adopted document, there is a bit of power. If an agency is requesting Capital Improvement Project (CIP) money, the Planning Department can point to the plan and say this aligns or does not align with the plan. The prior plan was adopted and used as a strategic plan by the administration. This time, we are focusing much more on the physical development of the city and will include a land use component to guide growth.
- *This plan is very much about the physical, but are there goals that are 'numbers' goals (economic development) and is there a metric by which this can be measured?* The Planning Department agrees that understanding the numbers is important and will include this in their next presentation to the Panel.
- *What are the qualitative and quantitative goals; what actions will be implemented, and how will the successes be measured?*

Comments:

- The team should develop a metric by which this plan can be measured, whether the goals are qualitative or quantitative. An understanding of where the City of Baltimore is now and where we want to be in the future should also be included, so the plan can guide development in the right direction.
- The plan should measure metrics, policy, and economic goals. There must be a framework that ties the pieces that the Planning Department is able to control to the numbers.
 - Important to understand what the numbers look like as a starting point – and then develop the goals based on where the Baltimore is at the moment.

- Opportunity to develop goals that parallel the goals of the physical built environment, such as population and tax revenue increases.
- Having a metric for evaluation will be critical to understanding whether or not the plan is successful; it will also allow for periodic checks to better understand how implementation is going – are the measures and goals right? Are they achievable or do they need to be recalibrated?
- Additionally, the team must consider who loses or wins if population increases downtown. Are there are going to be unintended negative consequences? Design is a tool to amplify the positive outcomes and mitigate the negative, but it must be used deliberately and carefully to avoid unexpected impacts.
- Can the plan overcome changes in government?
 - As power changes hands, directions or goals may change. How does the plan overcome setbacks that occur with change of administration? Including additional measures to ensure the plan continues despite future change will be a benefit.
 - There is a possibility of change every 4 years, with mayoral elections. This plan is supposed to last for 10 years – possibly longer. It is meant to guide the development of the city and will need to have the backing of leadership.
 - Develop a framework that can transcend changes in government, that is based in policy that Planning has control over. This can be accomplished with good policy, zoning, land-use strategy, etc.
- People are coming back to Baltimore, but not quickly enough. Consider what planning steps can be taken to encourage density.
 - Focus on three or four specific areas to become a catalyst – using a pilot approach will help to focus efforts, prioritize, and measure the outcomes.
- Need a better understanding of who the audience is for this plan. Is it the public, is it Baltimore City agencies, or is it developers?
 - A clear understanding of the audience of the plan will help to guide how it is written and what is included.
 - Highlight the positive attributes of the city: Hospitals, Universities, Offices.
- Geography – there are different views of what is meant by “Downtown” Baltimore.
 - Extending the boundaries beyond the main arterials will help to reframe how we think about the core of the city. Design on both sides of streets (consider expanding the boundary a block and a half on both sides).
 - Drawing beyond the boundary will help solidify the notion that the edges need to be permeated – breaking down the perceived barriers at MLK, I-83, President, Pratt, etc.
 - Consider how these are drawn and what they communicate. By drawing these differently, even in diagram form, the conversation can change.
 - Think about who is on the other side of the “edge” of Downtown and whether or not those communities have been historically disinvested. Planning is very interested in ensuring that adjacent neighborhoods feel connected to downtown,

and there should be a goal to spread the wealth of opportunity beyond the downtown zone.

- Blocks are joined by streets – common design problem is that plan view is very different from the experiential view, which is in perspective and includes both sides of the block; it should be drawn with a complete street.
- The sooner that the major arteries are not drawn as dividers, the better the plan will be. Develop a sub-district and start designing out an additional block and a half on either side. Major arterials can stop feeling like the edge - it may still feel like a gap to draw it this way, but that is an easier design problem to solve.
- Consider extending all the way up to North Avenue, plus the block and a half buffer.
- Look at the barrier diagram and create a buffer within which to start designing a perimeter zone. Revise this drawing and use it as a design tool – additionally look at the zoning on both sides.
- Look at the edges as territories of their own.
- Define connections.
 - Because the word “connection” has been used frequently both in the conversation, and in the presentation, it is starting to lose its meaning. Language is very important.
 - What kinds of connections (visual, physical, pedestrian?) Be more specific about the kind of connection being suggested:
 - Are you talking about a visual connection between places?
 - Is it a safe pedestrian connection between assets?
 - Does connection refer to a well-connected transit system?
 - Connecting people to their destination and then back out of the city?
- More concrete and specific ideas are needed.
 - Director Ryer noted that the plan must be something that can be accomplished. On the scale of a block, to plant trees, fix sidewalks, ect. is doable, but when spread out across the entire downtown, it becomes much more difficult to achieve.
 - Needs more granularity for actionable outcomes – figure out which things are the responsibility of smaller developers, and which things should be implemented by the city. Once the ideas have been broken down strategically and tactically, they become easier to manage and achieve.
 - Break ideas down – small, medium, large in terms of difficulty.
 - The NUMBERS are important. Plan could use walking distances as a metric, for instance the time each resident is from the closest park, grocery store, public transportation stops, etc. to determine what should go where.
 - Walking is a good quality of life metric.
 - Qualitative goals are very important, too – the ability to use storytelling and visualization are opportunities for the plan to explore goals in a different manner.

- It seems there are some ideas that cannot be achieved without major changes to infrastructure. Develop a category for the big infrastructural changes that are being suggested.
 - For instance, development on the eastern edge won't happen unless I-83 is removed and that is an enormous change.
 - Pratt Street is another one – the Harborplace development team has drawn their ideas for Pratt Street, but do they align with the goals of DOT? Important to consider if this is a two-way boulevard, if the spur is closed, etc.
 - MLK is the other one that has been discussed.
 - These need to be in a category of their own because they are important, aspirational changes that require big commitments from many agencies. They are so powerful in determining what else can happen.
- Visuals:
 - Little drawing from CHAP, which inventories all the buildings. Contains a level of granularity that is both specific and diagrammatic at the same time. Not necessarily easy to read but is very clear.
 - Circles / bubble diagrams are too generic. Use the model to get more granular – show buildings and zoning. Panel is very open to providing feedback as the diagrams develop.
 - Use the model to get more specific, and there is tremendous potential in the way you use it. It has potential to become the go-to document.
 - Parcel boundaries are more important than buildings because it gives you a sense of ownership and what is possible.
 - Overlays are important – this could potentially be a digital overlay that people can selectively choose overlays to see how they relate.
 - Look at the Atlanta City Design visual - <https://www.atlcitydesign.com/>
 - Amplify the public realm in the drawings – consider showing these as colorful, lushly illustrated and leaving the other layers as gray scale, less saturated, etc.
 - Additional diagram could be a Ven diagram showing the various systems of people, ecological/environmental, economic, with the center being quality of life.
 - A diagram like this can help organize what is being measured, how these things are being measured, and what indicates a success.
 - If the measures can be organized into groups, it will help with clarity of ideas.
 - This could be the walking metric, stormwater collection, cooling by x number of degrees, etc. Quality of life can speak to not just residents, but also visitors, etc.
- Ecological / sustainability layers:
 - Ecological overlay. Vacant properties used as stormwater parks to address resiliency.
 - Tree canopy increases are good, but there is an opportunity for a city-wide stormwater park system that could utilize vacant lots and tie into green alleys, bio boxes, etc. to aggregate a more impactful outcome for stormwater capture.
 - Landscape oriented facilities have tremendous capacity for operating as a system. These can also help mitigate water quality, etc. City of DC used this approach.
 - Biophilic corridors can also help with heat island effect.
 - Need for an ecological overlay, including stormwater management systems and habitat support, to enhance the city's landscape and address environmental concerns.
- What was missed / things to focus on for next iteration:
 - Numbers were missed in this version. Even if this is a form-based plan, it still needs a layer of data to correlate where we are and

- Ideas about implementation and sequence are reinforced with good, clear goals and measures for evaluation.
- Potentially too aspirational – tearing down I-83 may be too ambitious.
- Learning from other cities:
 - Atlanta City Design visuals amplify public realm – find out what they did to pull off stadium district, learn from them to develop a strategy for implementation.
 - Some cities are doing stand-alone arts and culture master plans as a sub-set for economic development. Look at history, culture, and arts together.
 - DC public life dashboard.
- The importance of balancing aspirational goals with practicality to ensure that they can be implemented effectively without scaring away potential developers or private owners.
- Tie the plan to other agencies / quasi-agencies to address who tackles specific ideas, such as creating opportunities for more activation after 5pm.
- Role of the Comp Plan is to not specific where specific things happen, but rather guide development with aspirational goals.
 - Not the role to prescribe “there should be a park here” but instead say, “every resident should be within a 5-minute walk of a park” and then let responsible agencies do their work.
 - Plans should work on a systems-based approach.
 - Street trees – part of a living system of stormwater management, heat island relief, etc. Link the smaller ideas into a framework that can address the
- Invest time and research in investigation of post-covid downtowns – sidewalks, office spaces, etc. Look at street sections / street typologies to identify a strategy for hierarchy of public space.
- Hear from the various cultural institutions about how they can draw more people. Empower the assets to impact their space – this could be an annual summit of cultural institutions. Could come together to share successes, challenges, and strategize common goals.
- Ideas about how to implement:
 - Potentially use Comp Plan as a development review tool to ensure that developments contribute to the overall goals of the plan.
 - The implementation of the plan should be done incrementally, with a timeline that includes shorter-term goals in addition to the 10-year plan.
 - Consideration should be given to integrating arts and culture into the development of different areas of the city.
 - Mapping and data analysis can be powerful tools for identifying opportunities and challenges, such as areas of disinvestment or potential for office to residential conversions.
 - No one department can implement all of the changes – it will require the actions of agencies, private development, etc. One way to ensure the plan is implemented is through incentives.
 - Working with the fire department to develop a strategy for smaller historic projects is a good thought.
 - Internal coordination between agencies can be really helpful for developments.

- Go beyond “oh that’s a nice idea” and call other cities. Schedule a good will meeting to find out how they were able to incentivize certain developments that the city aspires to. Was it TIF? Were there codes? Understanding how other cities have worked will give the plan some teeth.
 - Think about incremental implementation – in the past there have been changes beyond the control of the city (Red Line example). If the pieces are incremental, they allow for course correction along the way.
 - Use a granular approach to integrate ideas into the plan.
 - Include GIS data to target and explore ideas about student housing, redevelopment, office to residential conversions, etc. Target underutilized areas that are ripe for opportunity and could be clustered to spur development demand.
 - Develop a plan that can be used as a tool for development.
 - Include the plan as a review tool (UDAAP can refer to this as a benchmark for providing feedback).
 - Develop incentives to help drive private development in a focused way.
- Goals –
 - Panel feels that the goals should be reframed and aligned to the overarching idea that Downtown can serve everyone and be a well-loved and livable place.
 - Quality of life is the ultimate goal.
 - Within the ultimate goal, there can be sub-sets of goals:
 - **Goal:** to spread the wealth of opportunity in the downtown zone to the adjacent neighborhoods and beyond.
 - Sub-goal: create an environment in which residents can thrive and have opportunity to jobs and economic advancement.
 - **Goal:** Draw residents and visitors to Downtown.
 - Sub-goal: make a welcoming and exciting downtown.
 - Sub-goal: tie physical environment to the policy goals, such as allowing ADUs and streetscape improvements.
 - **Goal:** Foster connectivity to downtown and between the various assets that exist within the downtown geography.
 - Sub-goal: Address the streets and decide which streets should be prioritized for pedestrian circulation, and which streets should be arterial for vehicular traffic.
 - Sub-goal: Shift principles of past administration to get the
 - **Goal:** Highest performing public realm of any city on the east coast.
 - Sub-goal: Appoint a task force to study the public space including streets to ensure that they are functioning at a high level and contributing to the city.
 - Use a public life dashboard to help map data about what areas are in demand for street closures, festivals, etc.

Next Steps:

Continue developing the plan further and return to UDAAP for a subsequent review. The next review can be a shorter review, an hour or two, to review the drawings.

Attending:

Ms. Ilieva*, Mr. Anthony, Ms. Bradley, Mr. Storm – UDAAP Panel

Chris Ryer, Caitlin Audette, Ren Southard, Matt DeSantis, Nick Chupein, Antoine Heath – Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff