



The Baltimore Area and the Patapsco Watershed Achieve Success Addressing Vacant Lands and Blight

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the lead agency for the Baltimore urban waters location. Approximately 60 partners, including federal and state government agencies, Baltimore City, Baltimore and Howard County government offices, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are working to redevelop Baltimore area vacant lands and clean the waters of the Patapsco watershed. Partners agree that one major benefit of the Baltimore Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) location is that it allows nonprofit organizations and residents to access government officials in a setting where everyone is interested in the same cause. Stakeholders have expressed that “there is no other venue that allows for this type of engagement.”

ABOVE: Green strategies are used to address Baltimore’s vacant land problem.

The Patapsco Watershed spans four counties and flows to the Baltimore City Harbor and ultimately into the Chesapeake Bay. The watershed includes Maryland’s largest population area of approximately 650,000. It consists of forested areas, rural areas, productive farms, as well as suburban, urban, and industrial areas. The eastern portion of the Patapsco River is in a highly developed region and is subject to trash buildup and pollution from wet weather events.

Project Highlights

- Baltimore’s Green Pattern Book is a leading resource on strategies to address the city’s vacant land problem.
- The Brick by Brick program is creating local employment opportunities and salvages building materials for reuse.
- Baltimore NGOs are strengthening relationships and collaborating on projects, as observed by the Stewardship Mapping & Assessment Project (Stew-MAP).
- A future vision is a fishable and swimmable Patapsco River.

Green Pattern Book Mapping Tool and Competition Improves Blighted Properties

One of the location’s top priorities is addressing Baltimore’s 30,000 vacant properties that pose economic, public health, and environmental problems. Because the soil on vacant lots is often contaminated with pollutants, such as lead, wet weather events can create toxic soil and stormwater runoff that eventually flows into the Patapsco watershed. Additionally, many vacant lots experience trash dumping and attract crime, both of which lead to lower property values and weakened local economies.



ABOVE: A Waterfront Festival in downtown Baltimore brings together many urban waters partners.

These vacant properties can be turned into an opportunity to create greener neighborhoods. The Green Pattern Book is a resource of strategies for greening Baltimore's vacant lands, helping improve water quality, and implementing stormwater solutions. The strategies outlined in the Book will build attractive communities, empower residents, and reduce the amount of toxins polluting the Patapsco watershed.

Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and EPA provided \$300,000 to sponsor a competition through Baltimore City's "Growing Green Initiative" to transform vacant lots using strategies from the Green Pattern Book. Community groups, private organizations, and NGOs submitted designs, and seven winners were selected. The designs are being implemented and funded in 2015.

NGOs Empower Residents and Boost Local Economy

Through the *Brick by Brick* project of Humanim and Details Deconstruction, local residents are trained on recovering building bricks, flooring, and frames, which are sold for profit. For every 50 units deconstructed, 24 local jobs are created. Prior to the Brick by Brick project, Baltimore City demolished old buildings and disposed of all materials. This project expands the local economy, trains local residents, and reduces the amount of toxins from abandoned buildings that flow into the Patapsco watershed. Baltimore has a 20-30% unemployment rate and a large minority population, making this program notably beneficial.

The Baltimore location depends on NGOs like Humanim to connect with local residents. Many disadvantaged communities in Baltimore have long been separated from the Patapsco River because of industries along the waterway. NGOs are helping share the message of the UWFP in these

communities and also ensure that local input is included in project plans. One organization helping to connect Baltimore communities with the UWFP project is *Blue Water Baltimore*, a leading NGO that empowers local faith communities to take on greening projects, conduct environmental education, and work with new partners. For the full list of partners, see <http://www.urbanwaters.gov/>.

Future Vision for the Patapsco

The USDA Forest Service and the Baltimore Ecosystem Study have been working to identify and map all stewardship activities that care for land, water, and people in Baltimore City. *The Stewardship Mapping & Assessment Project* (Stew-MAP) is a network analysis tool that shows how organizations are working together in an area and how those organizations are related. A baseline analysis of the network was done prior to the work of the UWFP, and the Forest Service plans to monitor changes every 5 to 10 years. As the project progresses, the location hopes to see its already diverse network of partners grow and also aims to increase the strength and number of ties between partners in the Baltimore location.

The ultimate goal for the Middle Branch Patapsco River is for it to be fishable and swimmable. Through greening initiatives, all Baltimore residents get to enjoy the social, economic, and environmental benefits that come from having access to a healthy urban waterway. As the Baltimore location implements sustainable redevelopment plans, it will engage community networks, employ green strategies, and train local residents to achieve its goal.

Measuring Success

Success will be measured in two ways: partners and projects. The Baltimore location aims first to establish strong relationships with partners in order to build a strong foundation. From this foundation, meaningful and impactful projects can be launched. To measure project success, the location will determine:

- How new funding has been leveraged
- How effectively partners are working together
- How many partners are working together
- How many projects have been completed