



**White House Roundtable in Baltimore City**  
**Green Spaces, Cleaner Water and Stronger Neighborhoods**  
*Summary Report*

On Friday, October 14, 2016, the White House Taskforce for Baltimore City convened representatives from several dozen local, state, and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses, along with community members and elected officials, to discuss how to expand collaboration and improve coordination to plan, build, and maintain parks and green spaces, increase access to healthy waterways, and strengthen neighborhoods in Baltimore. The discussion highlighted the significant opportunities for environmental restoration and community revitalization in the city and the benefits of coordination across the public and private sector. This report summarizes major topics of discussion and captures some of the areas of consensus that emerged as participants looked towards the future.

**Opening session: Building Momentum for a Greener, Cleaner, Stronger Baltimore**

*Summary:* There are many ongoing environmental and recreational programs and initiatives in Baltimore to improve streetscapes, plant trees, enhance parks and recreational opportunities, build green infrastructure, educate young people on environmental issues, expand urban agriculture and wildlife habitats, clean up the Inner Harbor, improve water quality, and plan for the future expansions of green space. The first session highlighted examples of this work to provide a flavor of the breadth and depth of these efforts. Among other projects, the group learned about:

- BUILD's organizing work around Johnston Square to plant trees, renovate a park and revitalize the neighborhood;
- The Department of Planning's Green Network Plan and the vision for expanding Baltimore's green spaces through targeted demolition of abandoned homes;
- A high school environmental education program at Frederick Douglass High School;
- Water quality monitoring in the Inner Harbor by the Waterfront Partnership and Blue Water Baltimore, which will help provide a baseline against which to measure future progress.

*Key points of consensus:* The group agreed on the importance of ongoing coordination through the various existing partnerships and forums, like the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and the Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition. Senator Catherine Pugh expressed her commitment to continue these conversation during her Administration.



## **Deep Dive 1: Revitalizing the Middle Branch**

*Summary:* The Middle Branch of the Patapsco River is poised for a major transformation. The river is adjacent to historic South and West Baltimore neighborhoods, offering potential green space and environmental amenities to underserved neighborhoods. Despite decades of industrial use, the river retains small but vibrant wildlife habitats. The coastline is controlled by a small number of landowners, many of whom have already started working on greening projects, like the environmental education center at Masonville Cove. If these owners worked together with the city, state and Federal government, and other stakeholders, the Middle Branch could become an ‘eco-harbor’, creating significant new environmental and economic benefits for the city.

There are already significant efforts underway in the area, including:

- The Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition’s work to restore Ridgely Cove, long an attraction to many bird species;
- The Department of Parks and Recreation’s work to expand opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, rowing, camping, biking, and, at a new Recreation Center in Cahill, rock climbing, and archery; as well as their improvements of the Gwynn’s Falls Trail;
- The newly expanded Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, which will open up the Middle Branch watershed in south and west Baltimore to new resources from the Federal government;
- The Port Covington development, which will include 40 acres of parks, a living shoreline, and connections to surrounding neighborhoods via land and water trails and light rail; and
- Efforts to revitalize parks adjacent to the Middle Branch, like Garrett Park in Brooklyn.

*Key points of consensus:* In discussing the potential to build on these efforts, roundtable participants agreed broadly on four principles:

- (1) Any serious effort to improve the Middle Branch will require significant investment and coordination, and will likely require some kind of organizational or governance structure. This could be organized inside or outside of city government.
- (2) A major planning effort will need to include a broad set of constituents, including environmental organizations, existing landowners, interested businesses and private sector leaders, neighborhood representatives, colleges and universities, elected officials and a broad set of city, state and Federal agencies,
- (3) Long-term planning should be balanced with opportunities for short-term wins that can create a sense of momentum and keep stakeholders engaged during an inevitably long process.
- (4) Work on the Middle Branch should take into account the future impacts of climate change.



*Action item:* Participants agreed to continue the conversation on the Middle Branch, with a focus on threshold questions of timelines, resources and governance.

## **Deep Dive 2: Restoring Neighborhoods, Restoring the Environment**

*Summary:* Environmental restoration can help revitalize neighborhoods by creating shared public spaces, offering new public amenities, improving community health outcomes and increasing property values. Baltimore City has a number of a projects underway, some led by the city and others by environmental organization or community groups, which reflect this approach to community change. For example:

- The MD Department of Housing and Community Development has partnered with Baltimore HCD and the MD Stadium Authority to strategically remove blight and create new green spaces;
- The community organizing group BUILD is working in Johnston Square to rally neighborhood support for planting trees, improving shared public spaces and working with the City to reinvest in the neighborhood’s central Johnston Square Park;
- Baltimore City’s Green Network Plan, due to be completed in May 2017, is developing a vision for strategic investment in neighborhood and open space revitalization.

One opportunity that the city has not fully explored is around green infrastructure maintenance. Green infrastructure can beautify the city and improve environmental outcomes. However, simply building green infrastructure is not enough; it must also be maintained. A green infrastructure maintenance program could create jobs – but of course requires significant funding.

*Key points of consensus:* Investing in parks, waterways and green spaces can help neighborhoods and the city more broadly to grow and prosper. But these investments are most effective when the leading organizations and agencies engage citizens on the front end. Broad participation improves outcomes and increase a sense of ownership over project incomes, which in the end is critical for long-term success.

*Action items:* Planning, creating and maintaining green spaces – and in turn strengthening neighborhoods – requires significant resources. To help explore financing and resources, the group agreed to:

- (1) Bring creative thinking on funding and financing into the Green Network Plan by joining the Plan’s funding/financing committee;
- (2) Discuss how to expand funding for parks through a series of conversations convened by the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Parks & People Foundation



- (3) Explore models for water management and workforce development, with leadership from Blue Water Baltimore.

### **Deep Dive 3: Strengthening Community Environmental Engagement**

*Summary:* Baltimore is home to leading models for environmental organizing and community engagement. This session highlighted exciting projects underway, including:

- **KaBoom! Playgrounds:** KaBoom! brings together neighbors to build playgrounds over the course of a single day. Their theory of change: show that a small group of people can make meaningful progress in their community in real time. These projects bring confidence and “cascading steps of courage” to community members.
- **GROW Center:** the City of Baltimore and the U.S. Forest Service are piloting a Green Resources and Outreach for Watershed (GROW) Center that will provide both materials and technical assistance to local residents, empowering them to transform yards or vacant lots into community green space.
- **Sustainability Plan:** As the Baltimore Department of Planning seeks to update its original 2009 Sustainability Plan, the agency is engaging neighborhoods around the city through a strong outreach campaign. The Department is using an equity and social justice perspective to revise the existing plan.
- **Village Blue:** The Village Blue Project, a ‘science in action’ project, is designed to give scientists and citizens real-time data regarding the quality of the water in the Inner Harbor. The goal is to be a national model for using data to spark public interest in water quality – and encourage activism and a sense of public ownership.
- **Virtual tour of the Bay:** The Chesapeake Conservancy is launching a new virtual tour of the Chesapeake Bay that will bring the wonders of the Bay to Baltimore residents and others around the region who don’t regularly experience the waterway on their own.

*End of Report*



## **Appendix 1: Detailed Roundtable Agenda**

### **9 am: Welcome**

#### **Greetings:**

- Lisa Schroeder, Executive Director, Parks and People Foundation
- Catherine Pugh, Senator, District 40
- Antonio Hayes, Delegate, District 40
- Christy Goldfuss, Managing Director, Council on Environmental Quality

### **9:10 am: Session 1: Building Momentum for a Cleaner, Greener, Stronger Baltimore**

- Improving Baltimore's parks and recreational spaces: Bill Vondrasek, Director, Baltimore Department of Recreation and Parks
- Organizing at Johnson Square: Terrell Williams, BUILD
- Addressing water and sewer infrastructure and protecting the watershed: Rudy Chow, Director, Baltimore Department of Public Works
- Investing in green infrastructure: Shawn Garvin, Director, Region 3, EPA
- Planning for the future: Tom Stosur, Director, Baltimore Department of Planning
- High school environmental education: Jon Paul Snow-Stoops, Frederick Douglas High School
- Cleaning up the Inner Harbor: Mike Hankin, CEO, Brown Advisory
- Monitoring water quality: Halle VanDerGaag, Executive Director, Blue Water Baltimore
- The Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership: Genevieve LaRouche, Northeast Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Maintaining coordination through the Urban Waters Federal Partnership: Morgan Grove, U.S. Forest Service

### **11:15 am: Session 2: Deep Dive: Revitalizing the Middle Branch**

- Ridgeley Cove: Honorable John Sarbanes, U.S. Representative, Maryland's 3rd Congressional District
- Park space and the Middle Branch: Bill Vondrasek, Director, Baltimore Department of Recreation and Parks
- Planning the expansion of the Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership: Genevieve LaRouche, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



- Shaping a vision for Garrett Park: Michael Dorsey, Chesapeake Center for Youth Development
- Investments in the Port Covington shoreline: Tom Geddes, Sagamore Development

**12:30 pm: Session 3 and working lunch: Deep Dive: Restoring Neighborhoods, Restoring the Environment**

- Green Network Plan: Tom Stosur, Director, Baltimore Department of Planning
- Potential community benefits: Inez Robb, Sustainability Commission/Sandtown-Winchester Community
- Organizing at Johnson Square: Terrell Williams, BUILD
- Cleaning up Maryland, creating jobs: Assistant Secretary Carol Gilbert, Department of Housing and Community Development, State of Maryland
- Rethinking paradigms for maintaining green infrastructure: Halle VanDerGaag, Executive Director, Blue Water Baltimore

**1:45 pm: Session 4: Deep Dive: Strengthening Community Environmental Engagement:**

- Building playgrounds: Roxane Rucker, KaBoom!
- GROW Centers: Mark Cameron, Department of Public Work, City of Baltimore
- Baltimore Sustainability Plan: Frank Spero, Department of Recreation and Parks, City of Baltimore
- Village Blue Project: Shawn Garvin, Director, Region 3, EPA
- Bringing the Chesapeake Bay Home: Jennifer Aiosa, Chesapeake Conservancy

**2:45 pm: Next Steps**

**3:00 pm: Conclude**