



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

May 21, 2015

REQUEST: York Road Corridor Action Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Adoption

STAFF: Katie-Rose Imbriano

PETITIONERS: Department of Planning

OWNER: Multiple Property Owners

SITE/ GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: The boundaries of the York Road Corridor Action Plan (hereafter "Action Plan") are all properties having frontage on Greenmount Ave/York Road from 39th Street to Northern Parkway, and including all of the properties in the Belvedere Square Planned Unit Development (PUD) and the York-Woodbourne Business Area Urban Renewal Plan (URP) area. The specific study area boundary is outlined on the Study Area Map illustrated on page 17 of the plan document.

General Area: York Road is a significant commercial and transportation corridor running for approximately 2.5 miles through the middle of northern Baltimore City into Baltimore County. There are multiple nodes of commercial development along the corridor including the York-Woodbourne Urban Renewal Area and at the intersections of Northern Parkway, Bellona Avenue and East Cold Spring Lane. Adjacent to the commercial corridor is a diverse group of neighborhoods, which have evolved alongside the commercial corridor and serve as the primary market area for York Road businesses. Residents of these neighborhoods were critical to the development of the Action Plan, together with business, institutional and City stakeholders.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

The York Road Corridor Action Plan was developed by the York Corridor Collective, in collaboration with a consultant team composed of EDSA, STV, Inc. and Valbridge Property Advisors. The York Corridor Collective is a collaboration of city government agencies, anchor institutions, community associations, business organizations and business owners, non-profit organizations, and elected officials.

In June 2013, the Urban Land Institute of Baltimore selected the York Road Corridor for a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP). Over the course of two days, a group of local planning, design and economic development experts gathered to learn about the corridor and make suggestions for possible interventions. This group developed the theme of a "zipper," that being, the need for strategies that:

- knit together residents and businesses on both sides of York Road
- get people to and through the corridor
- fill in the missing teeth of the zipper in the form of disinvested or vacant lots or buildings
- establish a strong, centralized “deal making” entity to constantly represent and “work (pull) for” the best interest of the corridor’s businesses, patrons and citizens

The TAP panel issued a report titled, “Revitalizing the York Road Corridor, Baltimore, Maryland.”

Following the TAP panel and subsequent report, the York Corridor Collaborative was formed. They began meeting in fall 2013 and continued regular meetings until 2015, with the goal of acting upon the recommendations of the TAP report. Their primary task was to solicit funding for, and oversee development of, a commercial corridor plan for York Road, that being the York Road Corridor Action Plan.

There have been numerous plans and studies conducted for the greater York Road area over the past fifty years, including the York Road Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (2006), which contains a Commercial Revitalization element; however, this Action Plan is different from past planning initiatives for York Road in that:

- Its study area is only on the commercial corridor and does not contain a dedicated residential/housing element;
- It seeks to specifically address the commercial needs of neighborhood residents, Universities, students, seniors, families and merchants;
- It was prepared with a greater focus on a market-driven approach;
- It considers funding and implementation from the start; and
- It focuses on establishing the correct organizational structure to facilitate implementation.

This plan is also unique in that it came about through a partnership of anchor institutions, the business community, residents, and City agencies, with the help of our philanthropic and non-profit partners. There was also strong representation, participation and collaboration across City agencies throughout plan development, particularly from Planning, BDC, Housing and DOT.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan

The request conforms to the goals and objectives of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, *Live Earn Play Learn* (2008), including the following:

Live: Target Neighborhood Planning to Leverage Investment (Goal 1, Objective 4) and Promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and mixed-use development to reinforce neighborhood centers and main streets (Goal 2, Objective 3)

Earn: Enhance transportation options to provide workers with commuting options and mitigate traffic congestions (Goal 3, Objective 1)

Play: Promote unique retail venues as shopping and tourist destinations (Goal 2, Objective 2)

Learn: Improve the Physical Relationship Between Campuses and Adjacent Neighborhoods (Goal 2, Objective 3)

York Road Community Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan

The request conforms to the goals and objectives of the adopted York Road Community Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (2006), including the following:

Commercial Revitalization, Goal I: Strengthen the York Road Commercial Corridor

- A. Revitalize and redevelop the weakest portions of the commercial corridor
- B. Identify opportunities for mixed use development (residential/commercial) to encourage/enhance day and night uses.
- C. More effectively market the Corridor to neighborhoods and prospective business/development interests

Transportation, Goal III: Pedestrians are safe

- A. Better control the flow of vehicular traffic within the Partnership area.
- B. Improve pedestrian access to Belvedere Square.
- C. Encourage Pedestrian Circulation and Accessibility – make the area comfortable for pedestrians.
- D. Establish a standard that accommodates seniors and people with disabilities.
- E. Calm traffic on York Road.
- F. Install bicycle racks in commercial districts.

Transportation, Goal IV: Mass transit services and facilities are available, improved, accessible and affordable.

- A. Identify and assess existing transit needs
- B. Explore private and partnership-oriented solutions

ANALYSIS

This Action Plan addresses the need for an overall strategic action plan to guide commercial revitalization and redevelopment along the York Road corridor in north central Baltimore City. This plan supports the revitalization and sustainability of the commercial district over the next decade and serves as an information piece to attract additional developer interest to the many potential redevelopment opportunities along the Corridor.

The plan makes recommendations in four primary areas: commercial revitalization, major re-development sites, urban design and transportation.

- **Commercial Revitalization:** The primary recommendation is the creation of a Business Improvement District or BID. The BID organization would be funded by a mandatory assessment on commercial property owners, and replace the current Retail Business District License (RBDL) assessment currently in place. The BID organization would serve the following functions:
 - Supervise day-to-day operations on the corridor, including sanitation, safety and security,

- Serve as the “unofficial clearinghouse for sales/leasing/development opportunities with real estate brokers, owners and businesses;”
 - Assist with identifying and establishing a cohesive brand for the corridor; and
 - The BID organization may add an independently capitalized community development corporation (CDC) function – by acquiring, improving and selling properties.
- **Development Sites:** Create new market-driven development opportunities while building strategically upon the strength of existing uses. Three “catalytic” development sites identified were the following:
 - Loyola University Public Safety Site - Vision for mixed use “village center” that combines student housing with farmers market, retail and structured parking
 - York Road/Glenwood Ave - Vision for cohesive mixed-use development that incorporates existing uses at the Northern Community Action Center and adjacent medical office users into a single “medical village” with complementary public realm improvements (York Road streetscaping and a linear park); builds off of investments in adjacent Govans Manor HABC building through RAD conversion.
 - York Road/Bellona Ave - Vision for improving on existing triangular park with well-defined, “place-making” plaza space and 2-3 story mixed-use structures nearby for office, retail or restaurant uses
- **Urban Design:** For each node in the corridor, the planning team identified visual opportunities and weaknesses on which to build, in addition to the following over-arching recommendations for the corridor:
 - Create a Design Assistance Panel (local design professionals providing design assistance to new and existing businesses)
 - Use the design guidelines of the new proposed Zoning Code, Transform Baltimore, to inform new exterior renovations, expansions and construction
 - Facilitate targeted façade improvements
 - Remove visual clutter (mixing of public and private signs, banners/flags and advertisement)
- **Transportation:** Work with Baltimore City Department of Transportation and the Maryland Transit Authority to create a “Complete Streets” environment along York Road while improving roadway infrastructure, transit service and pedestrian safety. Specific recommendations include the following:
 - Evaluate signal timing and phasing
 - Strategically re-stripe and re-pave
 - Evaluate need for additional busses
 - Improve bus stop shelters, benches and trash cans
 - Establish University or other shuttle bus for corridor
 - Consider removing vehicular lanes for bus pull-off
 - Evaluate spacing between pedestrian crossings and pedestrian signal timing
 - Install countdown signal and pedestrian bumpouts at intersections
 - Provide pedestrian refuges
 - Widen and restripe crosswalks

NOTIFICATIONS

Staff mailed notifications to Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke and Councilman Bill Henry, as well as to the following organizations:

- Architects Row Community Association
- Belvedere Improvement Association
- Belvedere Square (Cross Street Properties)
- Blythewood Association
- Cameron Village Association
- Cedarcroft Maintenance Corp.
- Chinquapin Park Improvement Association
- Elsinore Village Neighborhood Association
- GEDCO
- Govans Manor Tenant Council
- Greater Homewood Community Corp.
- Govanstowne Business Association
- Guilford Association
- Homeland Association
- Kernewood
- Kimberleigh Road Neighborhood Association
- Lake Evesham Community Association
- Lake Walker Community Association
- Loyola University Maryland
- Mid-Govans Community Association
- Mutual Housing Association
- NECO
- Notre Dame of Maryland University
- Pen Lucy Action Network (PLAN)
- Pen Lucy Community Association
- Radnor-Winston Improvement Association
- Richnor Springs Neighborhood Association
- Village of Homeland East
- Village of Homeland West
- Wilson Park Improvement Association
- Wilson Park Northern Neighborhood Association (Wrenlane)
- Winston Govans Neighborhood Association
- Woodbourne-McCabe Neighborhood Association
- York-Homeland
- York Road Initiative
- York Road Partnership

Other City Agencies impacted by this planning process were provided a comment period before the Plan was finalized, including the Baltimore Development Corporation and the Departments of Housing and Community Development, Transportation, Public Works and General Services.



**Thomas J. Stosur,
Director**