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*From the Baltimore Sun*

## Finding a Way

### Leaders and residents offer possible cures for the American Brewery neighborhood

July 16, 2006



In recent decades, hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in Baltimore redevelopment, and those investments - combined with positive economic trends - have sparked a wave of privately financed revitalization in neighborhoods across the city. From Locust Point to [Charles Village](#) and [Hampden](#) to Highlandtown, housing prices have soared and commercial development has followed.

But neighborhoods across Baltimore - nearly 20 percent of its residential area, according to the city's estimate - remain mired in blight. The community around the old American Brewery, for instance, is filled with abandoned and neglected homes and struggles with addiction, crime, poverty and despair.

Two weeks ago, a two-part series in *The Sun* laid out a grim assessment of the near-term outlook for the brewery neighborhood, which lacks many of the features that have made others attractive targets for rehabilitation.

While a tenant has been found for the looming American Brewery building, city officials say they lack the millions of dollars needed for investment that might quickly spark a neighborhood renaissance. The limited redevelopment capital available would be better spent in places with more immediate potential, city officials say.

What can be done now to improve neighborhood residents' lives and raise hopes for a brighter future? That's a question we asked an array of Baltimore community and political leaders and average citizens alike.

Their answers reflect a realistic understanding of the challenges that the neighborhood and others like it present, but they are also surprisingly hopeful. Here is what they had to say:

#### First, get started

##### Ed Rutkowski

Executive director, [Patterson Park](#)  
Community Development Corp.

I looked at 16 square blocks surrounding the brewery building, an area large enough to matter, with clear boundaries. Geographically, it's an interesting place, and geography is a major component of any rational renewal

strategy.

Going for this neighborhood are the Struever Bros. redevelopment of the brewery building and Humanim, the large human services nonprofit that will bring 250 jobs to the building. That, with the participation of some committed neighbors, just may be enough, so the first thing is to get started.

Getting started means forging a partnership between the neighborhood's residents, Struever Bros., Humanim and the city. The partnership should sow the seeds for neighborhood improvement. As examples, Humanim should earmark some of their services for neighborhood residents; security should extend a block or two from the brewery, improving safety for both staff and residents.

Struever and Humanim can also leverage their activities to build social capital, for example, engaging and helping residents to beautify the significant amount of nearby green space, making the statement that "someone cares about this place" and energizing the residents to change their neighborhood.

Finally, what do we do about the vacant and boarded houses? Again, it's more of a matter of getting started than trying to find the very expensive answer that makes everyone happy. I'd suggest a variation of the early [Patterson Park](#) CDC strategy, taking advantage of the opportunity presented by many largely vacant blocks and fewer strong blocks.

Energized residents pressure the city to condemn the very worst blocks, even if a few of the houses are occupied. At the same time, community developers purchase as many properties on the healthier blocks as they can, using loans and investment dollars instead of subsidies.

Then, those developers modestly renovate the newly purchased properties, to a level a bit better than the currently occupied properties. They pay people to move from the weakest to the strongest blocks. Finally, the city demolishes the now-vacant blocks to provide more green space and future development opportunities.

At the end of the day, we get stronger strong blocks, fewer weak blocks and more green space as the weakest blocks are demolished. And existing residents get to stay in a neighborhood with more promise.

## **Improving self-image**

**Nikki L. Rochester**  
Neighborhood resident

The physical appearance of a community is more often than not a reflection of the self-image of its residents. The litter, abandoned garbage, rampant weeds and mindless destruction of property doesn't make a very positive statement for our neighborhood. But I believe that area churches, with some support from the city, could facilitate a significant change of image.

We have to CARE in concrete ways about our neighborhoods!

We have to stop throwing our newspapers, chicken boxes, soda cans, beer bottles and candy wrappers in the streets and gutters of our community.

We have to stop putting out our trash in ways and at times when it will be ravaged by dogs and strewn through the alleys.

We have to stop dumping our old furniture and broken refrigerators on the nearest vacant lot.

Our churches can lead and facilitate the cleanup and maintenance effort; but the community cleanup has to be coupled with some kind of teaching process that helps us to change our vision of ourselves and our community in order to have any lasting impact. It's a tall but doable and needful order!

The city can support that effort in low-cost but significant ways.

We need attractive trash cans landscaping our residential communities, offering a convenient and appealing alternative to gutters. We used to see them every other block or so on main thoroughfares (like North Avenue and Belair Road).

The city might also offer priority and courteous attention to the calls of residents for assistance with rat infestation, trash removal, unsecured vacant houses and the like in areas that have obviously embraced this change of image campaign.

## **Give people hope, support**

### **G. Stanley Steele**

Senior vice president of housing and community development,  
Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries

It is understandable that city leaders, other funders and private developers largely focus on neighborhoods that appear to have high potential for revitalization. It is hard to quibble with "building from strength," but this doesn't excuse nonaction in neighborhoods with fewer blessings.

Diakon Housing and Community Development uses a dual strategy: We work in older working income areas with the potential to regain competitiveness, and we work in those neighborhoods challenged by more abandonment and a frayed social fabric.

In more distressed neighborhoods - like those around the American Brewery - the tools must be more focused. For example, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries is investing more than \$5 million at North Avenue and Broadway to create a high-quality community facility with excellent day care, financial counseling, training facilities and attractive commercial space. This is just one step in stabilizing that area.

With an anchor, Diakon HCD will take basic steps to help the neighborhood.

First, we will reach out to residents, not just by holding meetings, but also by doing one-on-one meetings, interviews with leaders and even front step surveys.

Second, we will work to find out what is still working well. Who are the stable owners and renters? Which blocks still have old-fashioned neighborliness? Where are the best houses that can be leveraged for greater stability?

Third, we will identify those few critical buildings that must be addressed through boarding, demolition or, in some cases, by renovation.

Fourth, we will work to renew social connectedness through small actions that build confidence and trust. A special event for kids the night before school starts, a picnic on the front steps, installation of new house numbers or even colorful flags, or a dozen other inexpensive projects give neighbors hope again.

None of this work is high-profile. It doesn't attract attention, funding, or even much media coverage, but it is vital.

The more blocks that we can stabilize, the fewer truly failed blocks will have to be treated. The fewer troubled blocks, the greater chance that new residents and new money can be attracted to these "hotter" neighborhoods. And the more residents taking responsibility on their own blocks, the greater chance that citizens can succeed in rebuilding Baltimore as the mixed-income, diverse city that so many of us knew and loved.

## **A stake in the community**

**The Rev. Gregory B. Perkins**

St. Paul Community Baptist Church

Despite the obvious benign neglect in some areas and the gentrification of others in the East Baltimore community, there is still hope. The community of the American Brewery is a great community with a great legacy, which can be restored.

The city of Baltimore might consider cleaning and beautifying the empty lots. Create green spaces with planted trees, park benches, manicured lawns and recreational equipment for the children. This would create a safe heaven off the street.

Develop a closer relationship with community organizations such as the Washington Wolf Gateway Neighborhood Association and others to educate people of the importance of home ownership.

One of the ways to save a neighborhood is to give people a vested interest. This means making the neighbors homeowners. There are several nonprofit organizations that will partner with the city, the neighborhood associations and the churches in this process.

Somehow we must rehabilitate and restore the old abandoned houses which are still salvageable. There are several independent contractors who live in the community and are willing to do just that. This would provide employment and aid the city's real estate tax base.

We must encourage small, family-owned businesses to return to the neighborhood. This would include ... restaurants, dry cleaners, barbershops and beauty shops.

We don't need any more liquor stores. There are more liquor stores in the city of Baltimore than there are in the state of Delaware.

Finally, we need more police surveillance cameras to keep the drug dealers and the illegal drug activities moving. When the cameras show up, the problem moves out. Let's keep them moving. With all of the development and revitalization of the west side and the Johns Hopkins Biotech Center, let's not forget the neighborhoods.

**Use land, labor and capital****Mike Mitchell**Executive director, Chesapeake  
Habitat for Humanity

Adam Smith's capitalism requires the efficient use of land, labor and capital. Many business leaders will tell you Baltimore lacks all three. But an ambitious yet realistic vision could mobilize land and labor while raising capital to make a lasting impact on neighborhoods where the decline of the American Brewery and ones like it affect us all.

If the mayor and City Council commit to development in neighborhoods like this to grow the tax base of the city - not just because of the moral impetus for doing so - they must commit 50 percent of hotel tax revenues to a development pool called the Revitalization Fund (RF). This next year, this would amount to more than \$9 million. This money would be used to subsidize efforts to develop neighborhoods like the struggling American Brewery. To sustain and permanently grow the Revitalization Fund, 50 percent of future property and personal property tax revenues from the revitalized area would go to the RF to subsidize future development.

Second, private capital will follow if the city issues a request for proposals to organize significant numbers of small developers. Hundreds of developers in Baltimore are building decent housing but only in modest numbers of up to five houses at a time. Interest is growing among these developers to develop affordable homes in the \$125,000 price range. And homeownership is not just good for the tax base; neighborhoods become more stable, and children do better in school. The city should seize this potential today!

Revitalizing the neighborhoods requires that the city apply existing assets and resources from its Project 5000 initiative to foreclose as many abandoned properties as possible, focusing on the shells and lots of the north side of East Lanvale, and everything within the borders of Federal, East Lanvale, North Gay and [Patterson Park](#) Avenue. On a parallel track, the city will reach out to existing renters and owners to purchase homes and offering the opportunity to live in the revitalized area surrounding the brewery.

Given the jobless numbers in Baltimore, where only 56.6 percent of the labor force was engaged in jobs or looking for work -in Maryland as a whole, 384,000 earned less than a poverty-level wage of \$8.62 an hour as recently as 2002 - there is a tremendous opportunity to engage labor to renew neighborhoods.

The city must reach out to work force development organizations like Civic Works to focus on rebuilding and encourage a commitment to service. Organizations like the Job Opportunities Task Force have taken a lead to connect the jobless and the companies seeking them through a project called JumpStart, which teaches city residents through an apprenticeship to become an electrician, plumber or carpenter. JumpStart held its first graduation in May, and 13 of the graduates are working in the field for an average wage of just over \$13 an hour. The second class is under way, with graduation scheduled in August.

Baltimore faces a choice. We can complain about the realities that surround our community or we can get creative to revitalize our city.

## **Raze dilapidated houses**

### **Vincent P. Quayle**

Director, St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center

Thirty years ago, almost a million Baltimore residents lived in 310,000 housing units. Today, about 630,000 city residents live in those same 310,000 housing units.

It is inevitable that a sizable portion of our older inner-city neighborhoods resemble the East Baltimore neighborhood described in Eric Siegel's excellent articles.

I have long believed that we need to find a humane way to move the remaining residents in these neighborhoods to better conditions, demolish the houses and find a better use for the land.

## **Police on foot patrol**

### **Peter Moskos**

N.Y. college professor  
and former Baltimore police officer

Taxpayers leave the city because of nuisance, crime and violence related to drug prohibition.

Foot patrol is an essential part of neighborhood safety. They say patrol is the backbone of policing. But nobody has ever been promoted to patrol. Even worse, foot patrol is primarily a form of punishment. This needs to change. Police are more effective outside a car than inside.

Despite the best efforts of hard-working and underpaid police officers, violence around the American Brewery and in the Eastern District is out of control. But in the world of police patrol, crime prevention takes a back seat to arrest numbers. In the police world, arrests are good.

Police currently earn their overtime from court time related to misdemeanor arrests.

"Court is like our heroin," one officer told me. "It's just something we need!"

Police should be able to earn the same money by walking the beat and preventing crime. An arrest-based approach doesn't work.

On the worst corners, give police somewhere comfortable to rest. An officer on foot, even sitting down, can prevent a lot more crime than an officer in district court earning overtime waiting for a suspect who may or may not show up. By decreasing the number of minor arrests, this could pay for itself by shifting police overtime dollars from court time to street time.

In the blocks around Johns Hopkins Hospital, there is a police officer or security guard on every corner. These blocks are safe. We owe it to East Baltimore to make every block just as safe. Ultimately, the viability of the city depends on it.

## **Make it a Safe Zone**

### **Israel Patoka**

Director, Baltimore City  
Office of Neighborhoods

A comprehensive new city initiative called Safe Zone is aimed at helping neighborhoods like the area around the American Brewery.

The Safe Zone project is a unique collaboration between state and city government, nonprofits, and community-based organizations that targets geographic zones within the most violent, challenged Baltimore neighborhoods.

For a four-week period, zones receive concentrated law enforcement, city services, social services and community-building activities. Special police enforcement, including the barricading of streets to nonresidential traffic, provides relief from drug trafficking and sets the stage for social service delivery through door-to-door outreach and community events that connect youth, adults and seniors with needed resources.

Visible, positive change, multiple outreach efforts and increased public safety change the community environment from one of crime, neglect and isolation to one of stability, service and interaction.

The project strives to provide a framework upon which relationships can be built, community investment motivated and hope sustained.

Originally conceived in the Western Police District in 2005, the project has proven to effectively lower homicide and shooting rates. Within the five zones implemented in 2005, there were 29 incidents of homicides and shootings during the six months prior to project implementation. At six months after implementation, there were four incidents of homicides and shootings in total zones.

In 2006, there are 25 Safe Zones scheduled.

## **Actions, not words**

### **Penny Wooten**

East Baltimore resident

I polled some of the people in the neighborhood and other surrounding areas to get a feel of what the people who are stuck living there think, and this is what we've come up with.

There needs to be more bulk trash pickups; the alleys and small side streets have become breeding grounds for rats, as well as stray dogs and cats.

Boarding up the abandoned houses doesn't work. They have to be bricked up. Maybe find someone to donate paint of any color and paint the houses like the ones you see on East North Avenue to brighten the neighborhoods.

Owners of abandoned houses should be held responsible if the house is not habitable. Brick it up or pay a fine.

They need more police presence. Go back to zero tolerance. It works. That is the only way you are going to get the drug dealers off the corner. It was zero tolerance that cleaned some neighborhoods up. I should know, I was out there. I only have three years clean as of July 10.

A lot of the families are single-parent households. Mostly, the mothers and a lot of them are on hard drugs and afraid to ask for help, because they might lose their kids.

Every neighborhood needs a small community center that is open daily to refer people to the right agency, where they feel comfortable. Say, 'I'm a hard-core junkie and I want help.' If you say that to social services, they cut your check and take your kids. This is a real fear for the drug addict mother, so she stays an addict. I've been there, done that.

## **Place youth at forefront**

Rodney Friend  
President, Back Court Foundation Inc.,  
a Baltimore nonprofit that sponsors  
youth development programs

Since the appearance of Eric Siegel's Sun article "A Neighborhood Abandoned," I have been haunted by Karl Merton Ferron's photo of a young boy peering through the slit of a boarded window to watch older children play on the street.

Years ago, I was one of those boys. However, I was fortunate to find a safe haven in the local recreation centers. Despite the dangerous surroundings, I was exposed to some of the joys and opportunities in life through the encouragement and support of caring counselors.

Look around. Where do the youth in your neighborhood hang out? On street corners, in abandoned buildings, at shriveled parks or on dilapidated lots? We must get involved and give something meaningful back to our communities.

Let's give youth greater opportunities to experience life and to become integral parts of the revitalization efforts in their own neighborhoods. For example, through life skills workshops and job training, high school students can learn trade work, such as demolition, bricklaying, plumbing, electrical and maintenance.

Placing youth at the forefront of these revitalization efforts is the first step to renewing crumbling spirits in our communities and to securing Baltimore's future.

## **Invest in opportunity**

**Hathaway Ferebee**  
Executive director,  
Safe and Sound Campaign

The Sun report, "A Neighborhood Abandoned," not only highlights a devastated community but also the government's inability to deliver opportunity for its people. I argue that the revitalization of a community doesn't come from investing in buildings but in opportunity for its citizens.

When people have the opportunity for good health and an education and the chance to work hard and succeed at a job, they become the resources for neighborhood revitalization and prosperity. They become the ones to stimulate the housing market, purchase their own homes, generate a local economy and maintain a community where their children can play and grow up to be productive adults.

A devastated community lacks opportunity for its people, and this disadvantage is far more persistent and destructive than vacant buildings or any undeveloped historic piece of property. Rather than invest in a single building rehabilitation, the city can use those dollars to leverage private investments and create programs of opportunity and support to enable citizens to become self-reliant, as we all wish to be.

This approach is not only humanitarian but also fiscally sound when financed through the Maryland Opportunity Compact, a new state financing tool. The compact is a private-public partnership to increase opportunity for people so that -they can avoid or leave more quickly state-funded custodial care programs such as foster care (\$50,000 per child per stay of 48 months), juvenile detention (\$48,000 per youth per year) and prison (\$24,000 per person per year).

Recognizing that economic and community revitalization relies on a productive citizenry, the state instituted the compact to redirect funding from custodial programs to local jurisdictions to sustain and increase local programs of opportunity and support.

The state of Maryland spends \$612 million a year on custodial programs for Baltimoreans, because too little opportunity is in place in our city to ensure their safe and healthy development. So rather than all of our citizens contributing to a healthy economy - too many become the custody of the state - not because they, the people, couldn't do better but we didn't give them the chance.

The city can use its funds to leverage private investments to institute alternatives to state-funded custodial care and fuel a cycle of opportunity that enables the citizens to be our best neighborhood revitalization resource.

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## Resources

### Read more on revitalization:

Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood, Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar. On the rebirth of Boston's poorest neighborhood.

Networking Neighborhoods, Eric Van Hove. Political and social roots of urban poverty.

The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators, Charles Landry. Successful efforts to revive cities around the world.

The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life, Richard Florida. How cities are gaining from the preference for urban lifestyles of the growing creative class.

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