West Baltimore and Harlem Park Neighborhood Council
One-month progress report
September 2014

Smart Growth America met with West Baltimore leaders on March 15, 2014 to discuss how the community can make the most of the proposed Red Line stations that will be coming to the area. Much of the workshop discussion specifically addressed how the neighborhoods could attract development to the new transit corridor and how to ensure that such development is equitable, serves the neighborhood’s current residents, and helps address the community’s broader needs.

On July 22, Smart Growth America delivered a next steps memo to the community to summarize the issues and ideas raised at the workshop and make recommendations for moving forward.

Since the workshop, there is progress to report in and around the community, as well as ongoing challenges:

• Planning for the MARC Red Line continues.

• The Lafayette Square Association, the Harlem Park Neighborhood Council, and the Upton Planning Committee moved their offices into a renovated home on Lafayette Square, right in the heart of Harlem Park. Housing these organizations together is a big win for the community and is symbolic of the increased collaboration and communication that community leaders continue to push for.

• Several local community leaders joined City staff and elected officials on a recent tour of properties slated for demolition. This tour was an opportunity to come together and discuss demolition priorities and neighborhood improvement strategies.

• The community also has an upcoming meeting with Councilmember William Welch. The community hopes this meeting will help them better understand the City’s future plans and priorities for the neighborhood and establish clearer lines of communication moving forward.

• The West Baltimore community is hopeful that they will soon be able to sit down with the new City planner assigned to their neighborhood. This will be another opportunity to improve communication with the City.

• RCLCO is conducting a land use analysis to create a West Baltimore MARC Station Area Redevelopment Strategy. Among other things, the City indicates that the analysis will consider the possibility of building new affordable
housing in the area. The community is looking for opportunities to provide their input on this project, as some community members view this analysis as being too oriented toward the interests of businesses, rather than residents.

- Baltimore’s Horseshoe Casino opened in August. In addition to generating funds for community improvement projects in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the casino (which does not include West Baltimore or Harlem Park), it will also generate some future revenue for school reconstruction and new recreation centers, which could benefit Harlem Park.

- On June 25, 2014 Mayor Rawlings-Blake and several of Baltimore’s higher education and medical institutions announced the Baltimore City Anchor Plan (BCAP), a plan to increase collaboration and leverage and align resources with the city’s anchor institutions to encourage economic growth and development in Baltimore’s neighborhoods. Under BCAP, the City and anchor institutions will work together to improve public safety, local hiring, local purchasing, and quality of life.

- Several ongoing City initiatives are targeting Harlem Park in their efforts. These include code enforcement; the Adopt-a-Lot program, which allows neighbors and community members to create gardens in city-owned vacant lots; and the Vacants to Value program to demolish, rehabilitate, or redevelop vacant properties to make room for new housing and green space. Combined, the Parks and People Foundation and Neighborhood Design Council are currently working on nine community open space projects in Harlem Park.

As the above progress and challenges indicate, an ongoing theme is the need to improve communication and coordination, both between the community and the City and among individual City departments. Residents continue to feel left out or uninformed of City efforts, even those that are intended to benefit the community. By improving communication and coordination, the community could leverage many of the above progress points to have greater positive impact on residents. This is something that community leaders will continue to work for moving forward.