



Bernard C. "Jack" Young  
Mayor

## **Bernard C. "Jack" Young**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

## ***A New Vision for Baltimore's Middle Branch Waterfront Draws Closer to Reality as BOE Signs First Contract***

**BALTIMORE, MD.** — Today, the Baltimore City Board of Estimates awarded an initial contract to West 8 Urban Design and Landscape Architecture to develop the Middle Branch Waterfront Master Plan. This is the first step toward creating a network of world-class parks, trails, and public recreation opportunities along the Patapsco River's 11-mile shoreline in South Baltimore. West 8 and its team of sub-consultants were selected from a roster of qualified firms and three finalists that participated in an invited design competition in 2019.

The \$325,200 contract with West 8 covers the first of six planned phases in the Master Plan, focusing on site surveys and strategies to engage and communicate with area stakeholders about the plan. The work is funded by casino local impact grants overseen jointly by Baltimore City and the South Baltimore Gateway Partnership, as well as capital and operating funds secured from the State of

Maryland by the Parks & People Foundation. Baltimore City's Department of Planning, working in consultation with the Departments of Recreation and Parks and other city and state agencies, will oversee the contract.

"This contract is the first step in a plan that has seen great community input and support for transforming the Middle Branch into Baltimore's next great waterfront," said Mayor Bernard C. "Jack" Young. "The fact that we are moving forward with West 8's vision signals that we are planning for a bright future in Baltimore even while we address the challenges of today."

"With this vision for the Middle Branch, we have an opportunity to correct the historical injustice that has divided South Baltimore neighbors from their waterfront for many decades," said Michael Middleton, Executive Director of the Cherry Hill Development Corporation and Chair of the South Baltimore 7 Coalition. "Now, at last, our residents are reclaiming what is rightfully theirs."

West 8's work dovetails with the construction of a transformational capital project expected to break ground this summer—with the intention to activate a portion of this waterfront sooner rather than later. The new Middle Branch Fitness and Wellness Center at Cherry Hill will include a gymnasium, indoor and outdoor pools, fitness center, a raised walking track, and an adjacent athletic field complex in Reedbird Park. Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks is overseeing the development of the fitness center and fields, with \$25 million in total funding coming from the City, the State of Maryland, South Baltimore Gateway Partnership and the Cal Ripken Senior Foundation.

"As the new hub for indoor and outdoor recreation activities, the Middle Branch Fitness and Wellness Center will establish a gateway into the Cherry Hill community while encouraging interaction and collaboration with residents from across the region," said Reginald Moore, Executive Director of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks. "The overhaul of the Middle Branch Waterfront is an added piece to our commitment to reimagining recreation for Baltimore and its communities."

"Now more than ever, we need to take bold steps forward as a city," said Brad Rogers, Executive Director of the South Baltimore Gateway Partnership. "We're not just dreaming it, we're doing it. We're building Baltimore's next great waterfront, a place that belongs to everyone."

“The Middle Branch is the region’s next great potentially uniting force,” said Frank Lance, President and CEO of the Parks and People Foundation. “We are excited to be part of this effort, as we move forward on the promise of the Middle Branch and surrounding communities.”

The Middle Branch Waterfront Master Plan is expected to take about 15 months to complete. It will ultimately produce detailed design guidelines for a pipeline of capital projects that will improve the environmental quality of South Baltimore and connect the waterfront with adjacent neighborhoods, zones targeted for new mixed-use development, and the regional trail network. Once fully built out, the network of new waterfront open spaces will extend from the Locust Point Marine Terminal through Port Covington, the Spring Garden Industrial Area, and the Casino Entertainment District, to the neighborhoods of Westport, Cherry Hill and Brooklyn, and connecting to the Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center.



## FAQs: Middle Branch Waterfront Master Plan

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### Q: What is the history of West 8’s involvement with the waterfront planning process to date?

A: West 8 was selected through an invited design competition that Parks & People Foundation facilitated on the City’s behalf in 2019. Three teams with international reputations for visionary waterfront open space projects presented their qualifications and vision plans in response to a detailed brief that sought creative solutions to challenges in the Middle Branch. West 8 was chosen unanimously by a jury comprised of leaders in the field of landscape architecture, plus City and community representatives.

### Q: What has been the level of community participation to date and how will the community be involved as the plan is developed further?

A: The process leading up to the selection of West 8 involved the community at several levels, including open public forums and invited meetings with property owners, city and state agencies, and leaders of community coalitions. West 8’s scope of work establishes a program of community engagement at key milestones in the Master Plan’s development, including interaction with a Community Advisory Committee, public presentations, a project website, and site “activation” events.

### Q: What are some intended outcomes of the Master Plan?

A: The project addresses multiple interrelated goals that respond to views expressed by community residents and other stakeholders:

- Reconnect nearby neighborhoods to one another and expand public access from across the region to 11 miles of shoreline;
- Establish a world-class park district with free and accessible recreational, cultural, and ecological experiences;
- Anchor the trail network in Baltimore City and connect it to trails in neighboring counties;
- Promote community-driven and inclusive development projects that protect current residents of South Baltimore from displacement;

## Middle Branch Waterfront Master Plan - FAQs

- Restore the ecology of the Middle Branch while improving resiliency by creating new wetlands, woodlands, and living shorelines to buffer waterfront communities;
- Demonstrate on a large scale the beneficial use of dredge material in order to create new landscapes that leverage innovative financing instruments for ecological benefits.

### **Q: What are some features and amenities envisioned in the Master Plan?**

A: The Waterfront Master Plan builds on the Vision Plan created by West 8 and its team in response to community input during the competition phase in 2019. Elements of the plan that will be developed further for feasibility, costing, permitting, and engineering issues include:

- Waterfront parks with fishing piers, boating, expanded rowing facilities, boardwalks and overlooks, a “great lawn” and performance venue, all served by water taxi landings;
- A “Green Boulevard” encircling the waterfront parks and interconnecting the surrounding neighborhoods and new development sites;
- Improving water quality and biodiversity through constructed wetlands and “living shorelines” that restore the native Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and protect nearby communities and infrastructure from increasing storm surge;
- Transforming the historic Hanover Street Bridge into a linear park, with major traffic shifted to a new bridge over constructed islands between Brooklyn and Port Covington;
- Design guidelines for new development around transit stations and in other areas identified for more intensive, mixed-use development under Baltimore’s Transform zoning code.

### **Q: Are local design and engineering firms involved in West 8’s consultant team?**

A: Multiple local design, engineering, and planning firms are part of the technical design team assembled by West 8 for the Middle Branch Master Plan, including some that are certified Minority- or Women-Owned Business Enterprises:

- Mahan Rykiel Landscape Architecture
- Moffatt & Nichol Engineering
- Toole Design (WBE)
- Biohabitats
- Living Design Lab (MBE)
- Assedo Consulting (WBE/MBE)
- Post Typography

### **Q: How will the Middle Branch project spur economic growth and development for Baltimore?**

A: The master plan will focus on creating a pipeline of shovel-ready projects for implementation beginning in 2021. These will range in scale from smaller interventions, such as park structures, piers, and boardwalks, to major green infrastructure investments in living shorelines and constructed wetlands. All projects are expected to catalyze community-based real estate development in under-invested districts, including Westport, Cherry Hill, the Warner Street entertainment district, and the Hanover/Potee Street corridor. It is estimated that the entire project could absorb \$500 million in financing over 20 years, with short-term projects ready to break ground in 2022.

### **Q: What impact is COVID-19 having on the Master Plan’s funding and timeline?**

If the development of the Master Plan proceeds without interruption, it should take about 15 months. However, West 8, the City, and its partners have determined that the emphasis of the current scope of work on urban design, planning, and feasibility analysis may shift towards work on capital projects within the broad framework of the vision plan. Also, restrictions on gatherings may affect how community outreach is conducted, with online forums, surveys, posting materials, focus groups and interviews.