

# From Downtown to the Inner Harbor: Baltimore's Sustainable Revitalization

## Part 1: The Charles Center Plan

Vicente del Rio

PhD; Professor, City and Regional  
Planning Department, Cal Poly.

*The revitalization of Baltimore's Inner Harbor and waterfront is internationally recognized as a planning and urban design model. This successful story started in the late 1950s with the Charles Center redevelopment plan for the core of the Central Business District and its positive effects on the city's economy. In the first of a two-part article, Vicente del Rio writes about this early plan and its role in Baltimore's efforts towards a sustainable revitalization. Next FOCUS will feature his account of the plan for the Inner Harbor and beyond.*

I have a long-standing fascination for Baltimore's efforts in revitalizing its downtown and, particularly, the waterfront. In 1984 I had the chance to spend some time there, dividing my attention between research and practice, and I was in awe from the moment I arrived.<sup>1</sup> As an urban design scholar and practitioner, Baltimore was, and still is, one of the most fascinating international examples of revitalization, place making, waterfront redevelopment, and re-imagining. From a run-down, decaying, and almost hopeless case of urban neglect, economic exhaustion, and suburbanization, the city raised from its ashes, rebuilt, and became a great place to live, shop, recreate, and visit. Baltimore's success in revitalizing its Inner Harbor is heralded as an international model of success, and is noted in all professional publications. Despite the social and economic problems and downturns hitting Baltimore over the years, it is one of the most attractive, dynamic, and fun metropolitan cities in the US.

Notwithstanding Baltimore's success with its downtown and Inner Harbor, our field has not seen any comprehensive publication on the planning process behind this success. That realization came as a surprise to me when, in 2008, I was invited to contribute to a book on the revitalization of port areas for the City of Rio de Janeiro. At that time Rio was immersed in strategic planning for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, and downtown projects were prioritized including the redevelopment of a long stretch of the city's historic port. Since leaving Baltimore in 1985 I visited a couple of times and remained an interested observer, so I

gladly plunged into the article by updating my old records and studies, reviewing the literature, and consulting with personal connections there. My efforts led to a book chapter providing a panoramic view of Baltimore's fifty years of planning and urban design efforts leading to the Inner Harbor success.<sup>2</sup> However, having a publication in Portuguese limits its reach and, encouraged by several colleagues, I decided to adapt it for FOCUS.

My essay tells the story of Baltimore's efforts towards reinventing its downtown and revitalizing its Inner Harbor and waterfront, and the several components of a vision that has been consistent and sustainable enough to successfully incorporate political interests, market forces, and community needs. But I must warn the readers that this is not data-driven academic work but a professional-oriented story from my personal perspective. And because my account of Baltimore's fifty-plus years of downtown revitalization efforts and successful projects is long, it will appear in FOCUS in two parts. In the current issue, the first part covers the initial steps in the late 1950s with the Charles Center Renewal Plan. The second part, to appear in FOCUS next year, will cover the revitalization of the Inner Harbor and beyond. Hopefully, I will be able to show how Baltimore managed to plan for a short and long-term strategy, reverse an escalating number of problems affecting the downtown, and keep afloat as a feasible city. There are some important lessons in this story for planners and urban designers.

<sup>1</sup> As a Senior Visiting Scholar with the Johns Hopkins Center for Metropolitan Research, and as a Visiting Urban Designer with the City of Baltimore's Housing and Urban Renewal Department, from August to December 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Organized for the City of Rio de Janeiro's Mayor office. See "Baltimore, Inner Harbor" in V. Andreatta (ed.) *Porto Maravilha - Rio de Janeiro + Seis Casos de Sucesso de Revitalização Portuária*. Rio de Janeiro: Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro / Casa da Palavra, 2010, pp. 22-61

## Sustainable Revitalization

In revitalizing cities and urban districts, planning and urban design should be guided by a sustainable development paradigm that is best represented, as suggested by Godschalk (2004), by a pyramid with ecology, economy, and equity at the base and livability at the top (Figure 1). On the one hand, this paradigm recognizes that high-quality design interventions are fundamental for sustainability. On the other hand, because of declining public investment capabilities and the increasingly globalized market space, cities are looking for flexible strategic planning models that include public-private partnerships and participatory practices as competitive advantages.

Strategic sustainable planning must be a way to think and conceive urbanism, reflecting in the city as a whole and in its various parts. As a decision-making process, it must constantly be assessed by stakeholders, particularly the communities directly impacted by the decisions (Marshall, 2001). Each positive result contributes to the whole, feeding a sustainable process and attracting new investments, residents, and consumers that, in turn, generate additional projects and so on. Sustainable revitalization of urban cores, specifically of ports and waterfronts, has become archetypical of the post-industrial city, enabling cities to participate in a competitive global market where national and local identities, and quality of life are essential elements (del Rio, 1991; Shaw, 2001; Stevens, 2009). An important component of this complex sustainable planning process is place making, place marketing, and the constant monitoring of place quality (Kotler et al., 1993).

Baltimore's Charles Center and Inner Harbor plans had the National League of Cities Baltimore appoint Baltimore as the most successful city in economic development (in Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993: 62). As with any competitive product at the global level, the process of revitalizing central areas and obsolete ports adopted a model that is, at the same time, adaptable for both tourist and local consumption (Breen & Rigby, 1993, 1996; Marshall, 2001; Stevens, 2009). Among experiences of waterfront intervention and revitalization in post-industrial cities, Baltimore's Inner Harbor is a model difficult to avoid (Busquets, 1995). According to the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Baltimore's Inner Harbor is "one of the supreme achievements of large-scale urban design and development in U.S. history" (Millspaugh, 2003). By 2000, the Charles Center-Inner Harbor redevelopment plans had received 45 national or international awards and the renowned Frommer's guide consistently picks Baltimore as one of the top ten cities to visit in the United States.

The success of the Inner Harbor's initiative, its positive effects on the larger city, and its sustainability over time has made it an international point of reference: a flexible initial plan, open to community and private sector participation, a determined city government and willing business partners, a smart management structure, and quality urban planning led to the place's redevelopment and appreciation.

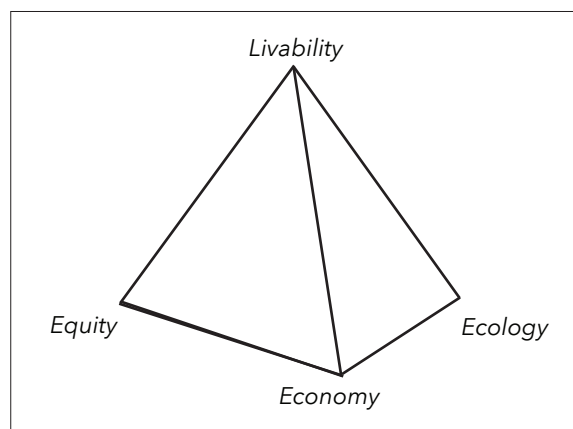


Figure 1: The sustainability pyramid (based on Godschalk, 2004).

## The Historical Context

Following World War II, not unlike most US cities, Baltimore started feeling the impacts of suburban development. Firstly, the federal government was incentivizing new housing for veterans returning from the war through cheap mortgages. Secondly, the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 destined large resources to highway construction to support the growth of the automobile industry. In the case of Baltimore, estimates indicate that most of the 30,000 returning veterans settled in new suburban tract housing Olson (1997). However, although Baltimore's industrial base had expanded significantly during the war efforts, it retracted in the post-war period and, by the late 1940s, Baltimore's industry had shrunk by 45,000 jobs (Olson, 1997). Labour cuts, plant closings, and technological reorganizations continued to hit Baltimore through the 1980s (Merrifield, 2002). Between 1950 and 1960 the city lost 18,000 manufacturing jobs, and of the 1,738 manufacturing firms that existed in the 1950s only 696 were left in 1984 (Levine, 1987; Merrifield, 2002).

The pursuit of the American Dream of owning a home in suburbia, the ease of moving around on the new highways, and the deterioration of Baltimore's industrial and economic base, pushed the middle and upper class families out of the city. With them went the shops, businesses, schools, hospitals, and public institutions. Between 1950 and 1960 Baltimore's suburban population jumped from 270,000 to 492,000 (Warren & McCarthy, 2002). Meanwhile, poorer populations with lower mobility—mostly African-Americans that had unsteady or lower paid jobs—stayed behind in the inner city with little or no economic opportunities. While white families moved out, real estate prices dropped significantly, and buildings became rapidly susceptible to deterioration, facilitating poorer families to move into older neighborhoods. The flight of families and businesses to the suburbs together with the changing economy led to a precipitous drop in Baltimore's real estate prices and tax base, leading to a spiralling effect of depression.

While in the 1960s an average Baltimore resident was paying twice the property tax than a suburbanite, the latter paid twice as much income tax (Olson, 1997). This phenomenon, known as “white flight”, had profound negative impacts on all large cities in the US.

Although unsuccessful, Baltimore’s late 1940s attempt to deal with its inner-city slums through zoning and code enforcement became a model to many US cities (Hoffman, 2008). By the 1950s the effects of the “white-flight” on Baltimore’s city core were huge: hundreds of lots had been vacant for over fifteen years, 5,000 thousand buildings were either vacant or deteriorated, 25,000 substandard residential units had to be demolished, and poverty driven racial problems were escalating since nine out of ten evicted residents were African-American (Olson, 1997). In Baltimore alone, between 1951 and 1964, highway construction, urban renewal and other public programs resulted in the displacement of 10,000 families of which 90 percent were black (Frieden & Sagalyn, 1989). By the 1960s Baltimore was the leading US city in tearing down old and poorly maintained buildings, causing violent traumas to the evicted families and contributing significantly to the escalating racial problems that culminated in the huge riots and burning that shook the city in 1968.

By the 1950s the Inner Harbor, Baltimore’s main port area, was also facing untenable conditions. Firstly, the old harbor’s morphology, the encroaching city, and the obsolescence of its facilities were severe obstacles to proper cargo handling and storage, new terminals, and modern port operations that increasingly relied on containerization. Secondly, the antiquated street grid limited accessibility to the port seriously impacting circulation and the movement of large trucks. Finally, because of the Inner Harbor’s size and shallow waters – both pluses for vessels in the past– Baltimore’s port was unable to attract modern and large ships.

Depopulation, deindustrialization, and the inability to solve the physical limitations of its port were lethal blows to Baltimore’s harbor (Wrenn, 1983). By the late 1950s, thousands of jobs had ceased to exist, and the maritime industry and most commercial activities had abandoned the Inner Harbor. Hundreds of warehouses and buildings were vacant, and the desert streets were taken by filth and wrecked cars. Baltimore became known as a city with a great past, but no future and the deterioration of its downtown became the major cause of the inferiority complex shared by Baltimoreans (Millsbaugh, 2003; Pike, 2009).

### **The Seed for Revitalization: The Charles Center Plan**

In 1954, Baltimore’s business community formed two important groups that would be immensely instrumental in the long downtown revitalization process that was about to start: the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) and the Committee for Downtown. Sharing the same economic goals, both organizations were preoccupied with the decaying down-

town and agreed on the need for a plan to reverse it. Among these city champions was James Rouse, a local visionary developer whose company was about to become a major player in Boston’s and then Baltimore’s revitalization efforts.<sup>3</sup> Although at that time Baltimore was facing strong competition from the suburbs and commercial sales in the city had dropped dramatically, the high office occupancy rate of 97% suggested a strong potential for downtown redevelopment (Lang, 2005).

GBC’s planning council hired architect and planner David Wallace, former chief of planning for Philadelphia’s redevelopment authority, to develop a plan for the Central Business District.<sup>4</sup> Wallace would develop a strategic vision and quickly realized that planning for downtown’s 125 hectares would take so long that “the patient could die on the operating table while the diagnosis was being determined” and decided to focus on a short-term plan for a smaller area with the potential for immediate impact (Millsbaugh 2003: 37; Wallace, 2004). Presented in 1957 and adopted by the City, the Charles Center Plan was the first focusing on the renewal of an American city core and one of the most influential in the US (Whyte, 1988; Lang, 2005) (Figure 2). It was the first plan to propose public-private partnerships, estimating a total of \$140 million (in 1957 dollars) in public investments (Bonnel, 1979; Millsbaugh, 2003). A more comprehensive, policy-oriented vision plan for the whole CBD was only finished and approved in 1959, and included, for instance, the expansion of the University of Maryland downtown campus and a new Central Retail Area, and the Inner Harbor as a future redevelopment phase (Wallace, 2004). Regarding place making, Kotler, Haider & Rein (1993: 333-334) point to the importance of Baltimore having a “comprehensive plan as well as a one or two key ideas that captured the public’s imagination”.

Implementation of the Charles Center Plan started with the approval of the plan and its 40-year urban development controls. Rezoning the area and establishing it as an urban renewal district followed shortly, opening the way for the city to use eminent domain and to seek federal redevelopment grants. Plan

<sup>3</sup> James Rouse’s biography is an interesting chapter on its own. An incredibly active entrepreneur and a major player in Baltimore’s renaissance, Rouse believed that the market economy should have a social conscience, a value that marked all his work life (Bloom, 2004; Olsen, 2004). He was a constant adviser to the US government on urban and housing policy, and his company was responsible for pioneering projects such as Columbia New Town in Maryland, planned with racially integrated neighborhoods. Planning shopping malls as gathering centers for the community in a context that welcomed social and ethnic minorities, the Rouse Company invented the festival mall concept that mixes retail, food and recreation, such in Boston and Baltimore (Frieden & Sagalyn, 1991). James Rouse was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1995.

<sup>4</sup> David Wallace was one of the most prolific and influential urban designers and planners in the US, having received the AICP 2009 National Planning Pioneer Award. In the early 1960s he formed a successful partnership with Ian McHarg, William Roberts, and Thomas Todd (WMRT). In his professional memoir he discusses his long involvement with Baltimore, including the Charles Center and Inner Harbor plans (Wallace, 2004).



implementation was handed over to a specially formed quasi-public non-profit entity, the Charles Center Management Office. The CCMO was the first of its kind in the US and, acted outside the city's bureaucracy it made implementation easier, more agile and flexible, proving fundamental for Charles Center's success. Later, the City would expand the CCMO's responsibility to include the Inner Harbor area, transforming it into the Charles Center / Inner Harbor Incorporated (CC-IH).

At its start, the CCMO had to deal with hundreds of parcel acquisitions and assemblages, the relocation of 850 businesses (who were moved back after the project was over), and the continuous negotiations with dozens of city, state, and federal agencies during planning, design, construction, and maintenance phases (del Rio, 1985; Lang, 2005). Together with the work of the CCMO, former president Martin Millspaugh (2003) highlights the importance of GBC and the Committee for Downtown's work in organizing an enormous network of contacts and efforts focused on carrying out the plan.

The Charles Center Plan covered a 22-acre (8.8 hectares) area which redevelopment would leverage the revitalization of the entire downtown (Millspaugh, 1964; Wallace, 2004). Departing from the urban renewal model of the time, the plan resulted from a wider comprehensive planning effort and it was more careful with pre-existences, not imposing a clean slate, fitting into the street grid and preserving four historic buildings (Brambilla & Longo, 1979; Wallace, 2004; Lang, 2005). The plan was praised by the general and professional media, even by

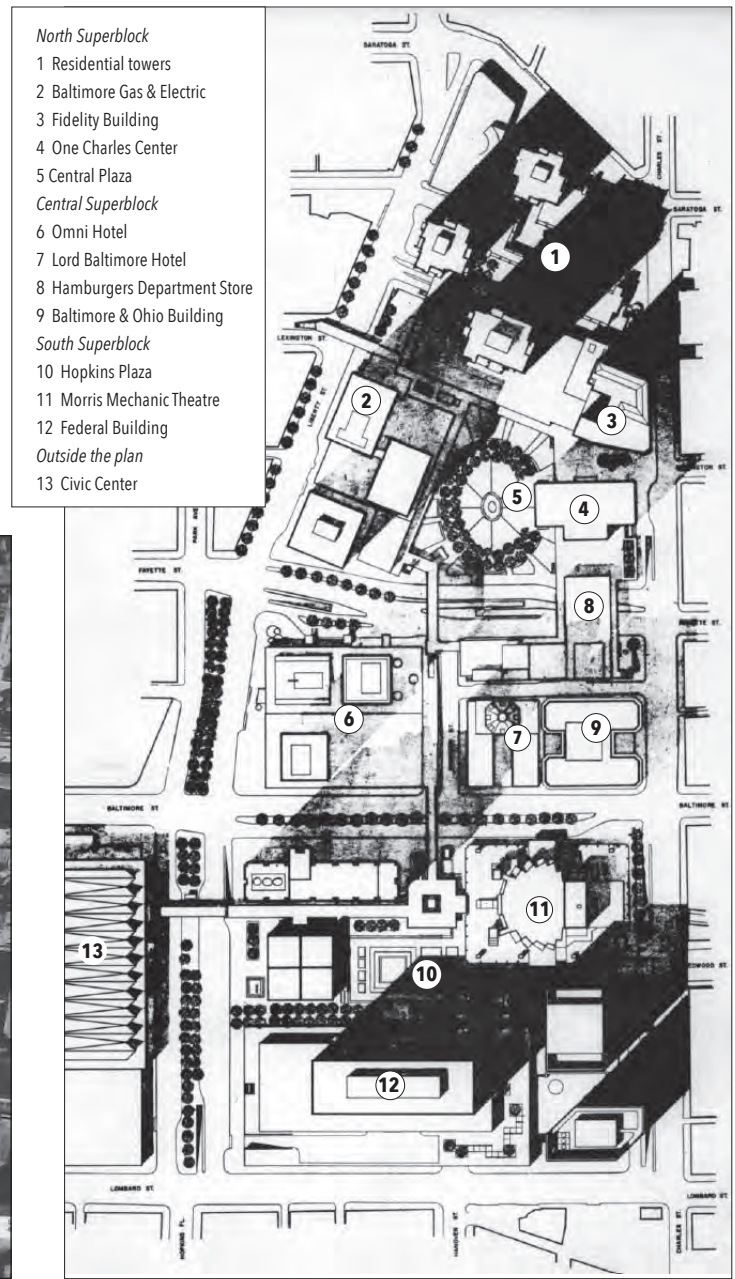
*Figure 2: Charles Center original model superimposed on an aerial photo. The Inner Harbor can be seen on the top of the photo. (original photos by M. Warren; from a 1958 booklet from the Greater Baltimore Committee, 1958)*



critics such as Jane Jacobs who called it "a new heart for the downtown" in a 1958 article (Wallace, 2004: 18). In a letter to James Rouse and the city, Jacobs noted that she liked the plazas and the attention given to pedestrians, congratulating the city for the plan being "less of a 'project' than an integral, continuous part of the downtown" (Warren & McCarthy, 2002: 36).

The plan included three superblocks with eight office towers and two through-streets running East-West (Figure 3). The north superblock included Center Plaza —Charles Center major open space— several office buildings, ground-level retail and eateries, and the Baltimore Gas & Electric Company and Fidelity historic buildings and a small corner plaza at the tip of the block. In this superblock's southeast corner site, One Charles

*Figure 3: Major elements of the Charles Center Plan.*





*Figure 4: The Center Plaza in the north superblock from the pilotis area under One Charles Center. The "skywalk" system starts here and can be seen in this photo. In the background, the old Bromo-Seltzer Tower. (photo by the author, 1985)*

Center, the plan's first new office building, would be inaugurated in 1962. Facing one of the east-west streets, the Center Plaza featured an oval-shaped space defined by landscaping, seating, and a double line of small ornamental trees (Figure 4). The plaza would become popular for public events such as the flea market, and its location and size "made it appropriate for big events such as the Baltimore City Fair, a popular event that drew thousands in celebration of Baltimore's neighborhoods" (Warren & McCarthy, 2002: 38). When inaugurated in 1970, the city fair attracted more than 200,000 people to Central Park and continued doing so until moved to the Inner Harbor.

The smaller, central block included an Omni hotel (today a Sheraton), two small commercial buildings, and the Lord Baltimore Hotel (today a Radisson) and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad historical buildings. Bridging over the other east-west street, a three-stories department store connected north and central blocks at their eastern-most corners. The south superblock, designed around Hopkins Plaza and its fountain, included three private office buildings and was anchored by a theatre—the plan's only cultural facility—and the 460,000 square-foot Federal Building. Keeping the federal administration services—including the court house and immigration services—from building their new consolidated facilities in the suburbs was a major victory for local planners and politicians, and fundamental for the Charles Center Plan (Wallace, 2004; 36-37). According to Warren & McCarthy (2002) note that, for many years, Hopkins Plaza's amphitheatre ambience surrounded by the theatre, the raised platform of surrounding buildings, and the pedestrian bridges made it popular for outdoor concerts. In the original plan, under the south superblock, an underground transportation terminal would allow passengers to transfer to city buses.

Although most of the success of both Charles Center's plazas was certainly due to the lack of parks and open spaces in the downtown, the spaces and the connections between them and the buildings in the three superblocks were comfortable and attractive for pedestrians and revealed nice vistas. Finally, Charles Center's original plan included two major modernistic features to help link the three superblocks that reflected the planners' modernistic inspiration: a consolidated underground parking structure for 4,000 cars and a series of pedestrian bridges, as the planners wanted to take advantage of the site's 68-foot drop. The idea for a single underground garage across all Charles Center properties was dropped early because of the numerous ownership and management problems to be dealt with. Instead, each site would pursue its underground parking solution.

A system of pedestrian bridges, nicknamed "skyway", integrated with open spaces and promenades, was to make the pedestrian experience comfortable and separate from vehicular traffic (see Figures 3 & 4). This system was like a spine linking the middle of superblocks north to south and also meant to help animate the second floors of buildings, particularly when dedicated to retail. Starting at the Center Plaza, the pedestrian bridge linked to the second floors of the Omni and Lord Baltimore hotels in the mid-superblock, and then to the Morris Mechanic Theatre and the Hopkins Plaza in the south superblock. The south superblock was also bridged to the Civic Center on the west and, in the following phase, to the block to the south and beyond, eventually, the Inner Harbor.

### **Implementation and Changes to the Original Plan**

In 1999, forty years after adoption and when its special redevelopment controls expired, we can consider that the Charles Center Plan was successful in reaching its goals. David Wallace, Charles Center's chief urban planner, notes that "from an economic and fiscal point of view... it has been an outstanding success... turning the CBD from an urban disaster into a national model" (Wallace, 2004: 32). Above all, Charles Center was as a fundamental catalyst for the wider CBD plan and helped direct revitalization towards the Inner Harbor.

The early formation of the CCMO (and its later expansion to incorporate the Inner Harbor) with its effective pro-active work was, without a doubt, fundamental for plan implementation and respect for its vision, while pursuing public-private partnerships and responding to market fluctuations. A 1989 study included Baltimore as one of the ten most entrepreneurial and best manages cities in the US (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993: 328). For instance, feasibility and market studies led to three early changes to the original plan. Firstly, the concept for a single consolidated underground garage across the three superblocks was dropped out for each site having its own solution. Secondly, the idea of an underground transportation terminal in the south superblock was given up but the Baltimore's 1965 Area Mass Transportation Plan



replaced it with a subway station. The subway line and station serving Charles Center became operational in the early 1980s.

The third early major change to the plan affected the top portion of the north superblock that had its land-use converted from office to residential and a proposed mid-rise parking structure stricken out. According to Wallace (2004), the expansion of office uses in the CBD suggested the need for upper-income apartments. The resulting two residential towers with 400 apartments were offered, instead, to lower-middle income families, the most evident demand at the time. However, the towers did not do well and, by the 1990s, were refurbished into upscale apartments plus a small shopping center at the ground floor, responding to the growing demands of downtown's residential market (see number 3 in Figure 3).

All architectural projects in Charles Center had to comply with the plan's specifics and be submitted to an architectural review board created by the City and the CCMO (Wallace, 2004). The board created site-specific design guidelines that were included in requests for proposals as conditions of sale to guarantee "how each separate buildings was to fit into the place as a whole and connect to its surroundings" (Wallace, 2004: 37). The same author notes that Baltimore's practice became a model for urban renewal projects funded by the federal government. In 1959, Charles Center's architectural review board developed the guidelines for and supervised one of the most important strategic decisions: a national competition to choose a development proposal for the plan's first office building at a prominent corner site in the north superblock.

The competition for One Charles center was an effective marketing strategy in attracting the attention of the national media towards Baltimore's redevelopment efforts and its commitment to modernity through design. Presented by a developer from Chicago, the winning project proposal was designed by famous modernist architect Mies Van der Rohe. Inaugurated in 1962, One Charles Center was Mies's last project before his death and it was typical of his well-known International Style: a 23-story steel and dark glass tower on columns, with great transparency on the ground floor and dedicating most of it for a public plaza (Figure 5). The strategy helped to raise the private investors' confidence in the success of the city's redevelopment efforts. So much so that the developer who came second in the competition with a project by Marcel Breuer (another top modernist architect) assembled a site across the street from One Charles Center and had an office tower built first (Frieden & Sagalyn, 1989; Wallace, 2004). Fortunately, local demand for office use was strong enough, and both were leased quickly, generating an important demonstration effect.

By 1962, based on the recently approved master plan for the CBD --also developed by Wallace and his group-- the City built a Civic Center --now named 1st. Mariner Arena-- and an attached parking structure with the hopes of attracting the public to downtown events (see map in Figure 3). This was an important

addition to the momentum created by Charles Center and the revitalization of the CBD. Covering an entire 6-acre block west of Charles Center's south superblock and linked to it by a pedestrian bridge, the Civic Center was designed by Pietro Belluschi, another famous modernist architect at the time, for 14,000 sitting spectators. Over the years it hosted numerous events such as basketball games, circus, monster trucks shows, and concerts by bands such as the Beatles, Cream Led Zeppelin, Grateful Dead, Jethro Tull, Bruce Springsteen, and Beyonce. Although over the years the building went through two major renovations, it has been a continuous success and a money-maker. However, by 2014 the City was entertaining proposals from private developers to redevelop the block into a new, modern facility topped by a residential tower with retail at street level. Located at walking distance from plenty of parking, subway stations, and the Inner Harbor, this is a strategic location and its redevelopment potential further, demonstrates Baltimore's CBD positive dynamics.

*Figure 5: One Charles Center designed by Mies Van der Rohe, and the Hamburgers department store spanning over Fayette Street (demolished in the late 1980s). (photo by the author, 1985)*





Figure 6: Getting to the south superblock from the "skywalk": the Morris Mechanic Theatre on the left, Hopkins Plaza, and the Federal Building in the background. (photo by the author, 1986)



Figure 7: The new design for Center Plaza includes four big lawns and smaller planters, plenty of trees and seating, and a water feature on its west edge. (photo from [www.mahanrykiel.com](http://www.mahanrykiel.com))

Figure 8: The Hopkins Plaza in the south superblock in 2002 receiving minor maintenance work, showing the Federal Building and an access to underground parking. (photo by the author, 2002)



By 1963, in addition to Mies's office building, Charles Center featured two new office buildings while six were in the pipeline. By 1967, the south superblock had received two major projects: the Federal Office Building and the 1,600-seat Morris Mechanic Theater, the plan's only cultural facility. Anchoring the Hopkins Plaza and directly connected to the skywalk system, the theater was built and named after a local entrepreneur who had other such venues in Baltimore. According to Wallace (2004: 35), originally Morris Mechanic wanted Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, or Philip Johnson to design his building, but settled for brutalist architect John Johansen whose "multi-use complex's layer-cake of public parking underground, retail on the first and theatre on the second level, with different ownerships on each, was an innovative legal as well as architectural creation" (Figure 6).

Unfortunately, the building's architecture was never popular, and the ground level retail was never strong enough, perhaps due to the lack of residential use in the immediate vicinity besides the pull factor from the Inner Harbor. The Morris Mechanic Theater remained Baltimore's main venue for major plays and Broadway acts until the early 1990s when its physical limitations started preventing larger contemporary acts. The theatre closed in 2004, but its underground parking garage continued to operate until the building was torn down in 2015 after local preservationists failed in their attempt to have it granted landmark status. In 2016 the city approved a project for the site that included two towers of 33 and 19 stories with 450 apartments, restaurants and retail over five stories of underground parking—taking advantage of the subway station in that location and responding to the increasing demand for downtown living.

After their initial success, neither of Charles Center's two main plazas were able to retain the dynamism originally envisioned by the planned, no doubt because of being surrounded mostly by offices and of the stronger pull of the revitalized Inner Harbor and its parks. Center Plaza in the north superblock, never recovered from losing its several seasonal public events to the Inner Harbor, and its arid modernistic design became disfavored by the community. It was renovated in 2007 and it now features extensive green-scaping, a water feature with a pool, movable seating, and night-lighting effects (Figure 7). In the south-superblock, Hopkins Plaza had a similar fate due to the always weak retail around it and the closing of the Mechanic Theatre (Figure 8). The Cultural Landscape Foundation (n.d.) notes that "the introverted nature of the plan was a built-in handicap and prevented the lively, populous atmosphere envisioned by planners." As major flaws, they point to the placement of the two major plazas inside the superblocks, the excessive hardscaping, the fixed seating, the separate building ownership, and the fact that several of the office buildings had their own subsidized cafeterias discouraging workers to lunch in the plazas.

The skywalk—the extensive system of pedestrian bridges connecting the superblocks to the Inner Harbor—started to



be dismantled in the late 1980s and none remains (Figure 8). Time showed that people prefer to walk at street level, and the prospect for a strong retail component on second floors never happened (Whyte, 1988; Lang, 2005). Planner David Wallace recognized this problem and noted that some of the skywalks blocked views from the street into the plazas and they were “circuitous and hard to find” (Wallace, 2004: 33).

By 1998, the plan’s retail building that spanned over a street connecting the mid and north superblocks was torn down after the original department store occupying it closed and its “tunnel like” effect was recognized as too unpopular (Powell, 2011). Currently, the resulting north corner parcel has a one-story retail building with a roof-top plaza connected to One Charles Center --the designed by Mies Van der Rohe building. In the south corner parcel, a new three-story building holds the Johns Hopkins University’s business school, whose MBAs, part-time, and weekend courses generate significant activity.



Figure 8: Traversing the center superblock, the skywalk (now demolished) along the Lord Baltimore (left) and Omni (right) hotels, before getting to the south superblock by the theatre (left) and the Federal Building (background). (photo by the author, 1986)

Figure 9: The Charles Center area now; compare map and legend to those in Figure 3. (Aerial photo from Google Earth)

- |                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>North Superblock</i>   |                           |
| 1                         | Residential towers        |
| 2                         | Baltimore Gas & Electric  |
| 3                         | Fidelity Building         |
| 4                         | One Charles Center        |
| 5                         | Central Plaza             |
| <i>Central Superblock</i> |                           |
| 6                         | Omni Hotel                |
| 7                         | Lord Baltimore Hotel      |
| 8                         | Johns Hopkins Bus. School |
| 9                         | Baltimore & Ohio Building |
| <i>South Superblock</i>   |                           |
| 10                        | Hopkins Plaza             |
| 11                        | Morris Mechanic Theatre   |
| 12                        | Federal Building          |
| <i>Outside the plan</i>   |                           |
| 13                        | Civic Center              |
| 14                        | Inner Harbor              |





### Final Remarks - Towards the Inner Harbor

As noted by Lang (2005), although Charles Center adapted to specific demands from clients, to the evolving property market, and got considerably denser than the original plan, it retained most of its qualities over the years. However, although the Charles Center Plan had the right ingredients for what, at the time, was thought to lead to a successful place, its implementation revealed many of the shortcomings of modernism that, in this case, can be grouped into three types: land use, management, and design.

Firstly and above all, the lack of a live-in population impacted the plan by not making its spaces lived in and dynamic enough. The weight towards office and commercial uses in the original plan not only reflected the trend of the time towards implementing strick-line CBDs in central cities, but also the only market demand that still existed in downtown Baltimore in the mid-1950s as noted above. The plan even innovated, if compared to others of that era, by including two residential towers in the north superblock. However, all the other buildings in Charles Center and its surroundings remained exclusively non-residential until the late 1980s when the revitalization of the Inner Harbor started to ripple back to the downtown. The mixed-use project replacing the Mechanic Theatre and the proposed to redevelopment the old Civic Center block should generate almost 1,000 new apartments and increase the round-the-clock usage of Charles Center. Another land-use problem derived from the number of single-company office buildings with their own cafeterias that discouraged employees to eat outside and help in the dynamics of the plazas.

Regarding management, problems seem to have happened at two levels. The first, higher level of problems was caused by the lack of a tighter and more comprehensive planning process that could consider the negativities that the success of each new plan or initiative could cause on the previous. Although it was Charles Center's success that leveraged the Baltimore's efforts throughout the CBD and the redevelopment of the Inner Harbor, once the waterfront was recuperated it became too much of a "seductive competitor" (Wallace, 2004: 32). The second level of management problems occurred, as pointed out by The Cultural Landscape Foundation (n.d.), because the city government did not retain ownership of the system of open spaces and exterior infrastructure but for the three plazas, so their treatment, management, and maintenance were up to individual building owners and tenants.

The third and last type of problems are related to design. As Wallace (2004) and other observers recognized, the Charles Center Plan suffers from the introverted lay-out, the lack of design coherence, the failure of the skywalk system, and the poor architectural solutions of many of the buildings. On this last problem, based on his professional experience, Wallace (2004) notes that no matter how good the urban design guidelines, you still need good architects to produce good

design and a memorable place. Frieden & Sagalyn (1989: 42) were more negative noting that Charles Center's superblocks structure was more appropriate to the suburbs, fitting poorly with the surrounding context and adding little to the attractiveness of the downtown.

However, the future and integrity of the Charles Center Plan may be at risk. As David Wallace (2004) pointed out in his memoirs, since Charles Center's 40-year design and redevelopment controls expired in 1999 and the current downtown zoning ordinance allows a 14 FAR (floor area ratio), market pressures and developers' proposals to intensify development may lead the city to drastic changes to the original concepts.

The early success and repercussions of Charles Center encouraged the City to follow the planners and the GBC's recommendation and expand revitalization efforts to another phase, focusing on the much larger area to the south known as Inner Harbor. Covering a 240-acre one-block deep area around the harbor's edge, the Inner Harbor Project I Urban Renewal Plan was presented in 1964 and adopted by the city and the federal government as in 1967. The Inner Harbor plan was an almost instant success and, by creating a new, strong connection between Baltimore and its waterfront, it revealed untapped potentials that generated economic, recreational impacts and ripple effects much larger than expected.

Together, Charles Center and the Inner Harbor plans prove the importance of sustainable revitalization for Baltimore's livability efforts. But the story of Baltimore's Inner Harbor, and the conclusion for this two-part article, will have to wait until next year's FOCUS.

### Note

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