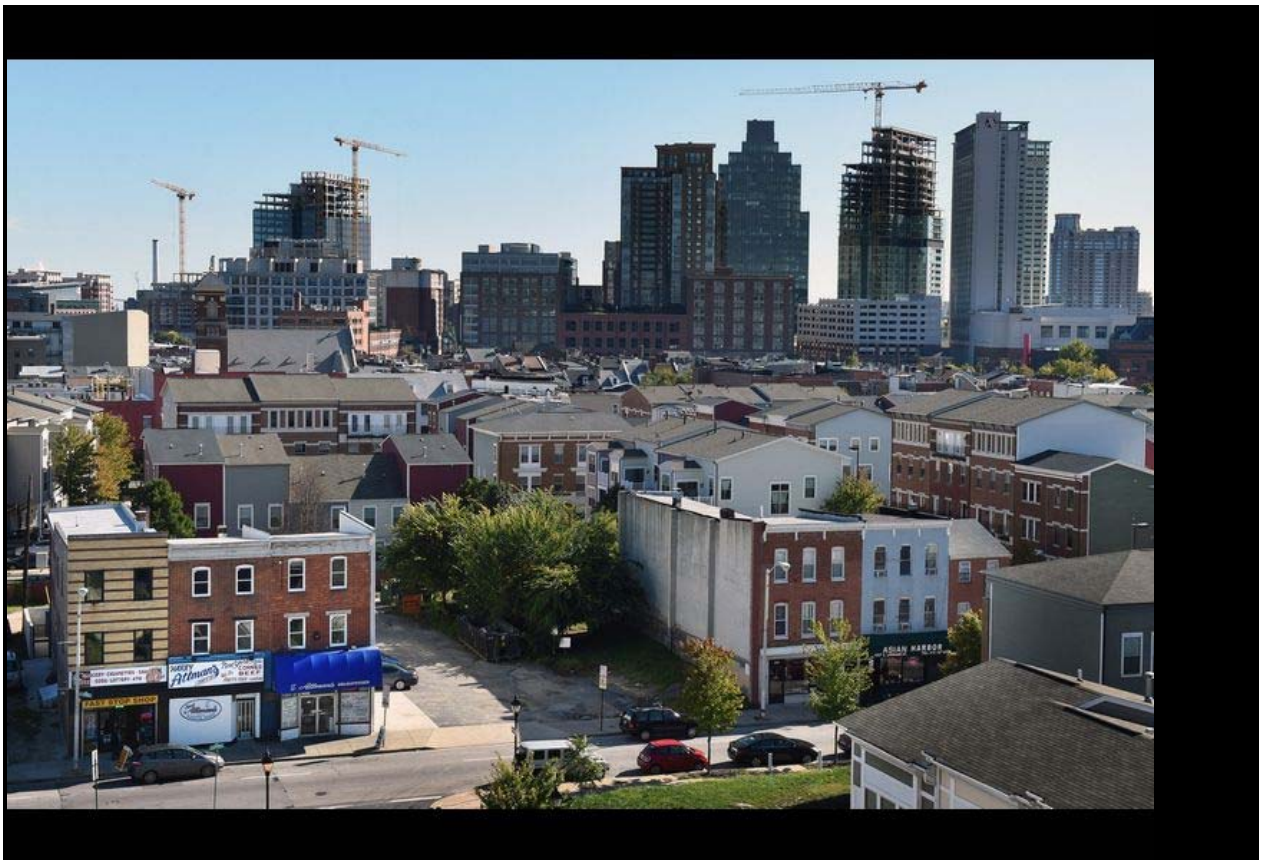


With new logo, Jonestown wants to raise its profile



By NATALIE SHERMAN

BALTIMORE SUN



Jonestown neighborhood

The Jonestown Neighborhood, foreground, looking south from Attman's Deli, lower left, on Lombard Street. (Kenneth K. Lam / Baltimore Sun)

Ask anyone in Baltimore where the Shot Tower is and they likely can tell you, but many wouldn't be able to name the neighborhood.

If locals can't identify Jonestown, boosters wonder how tourists will find the neighborhood north of Little Italy that's home to several landmarks and historic homes. Even Baltimore's tourist maps overlook the area, colorfully highlighting such nearby destinations as the Inner Harbor, Federal Hill, Harbor East, Fells Point and Canton, while leaving Jonestown and other areas in a drab gray.

"You see Canton and Fells Point and even Pigtown, but you don't see Jonestown," Marvin Pinkert, executive director of the Jewish Museum of Maryland, said of the maps. "It's very hard to be successful, if, from a geographic point of view, you're perceived as being in the middle of nowhere." Pinkert, who was named head of the museum in 2012, organized an effort designed to change that view, placing Jonestown on the city's mental and physical map by branding it as a historic neighborhood, proud of its diversity and service organizations.

With \$70,000 in donations from area foundations, the Jewish Museum commissioned a master plan, complete with a logo and slogan, that calls for adding life to the neighborhood's streets with an urban farm, a playground, festivals and temporary street exhibits housed in large shipping containers. It also suggests improvements to make the Shot Tower park more inviting and calls for redeveloping the neighborhood's roughly half-dozen publicly owned vacant sites.

Those sites were supposed to be built up as part of the mixed-income Albemarle Square housing project, but the lots were never developed. The hope is to bring the neighborhood into the mainstream visitor circuit and build confidence in its redevelopment prospects after decades of being passed by.

Pinkert had selfish reasons for commissioning the plan. About 10,000 people visit the Jewish Museum each year. Increasing that number, even with high-profile exhibits, such as one on musician Paul Simon scheduled to open Oct. 11, can't succeed without changing the perception of the neighborhood and its reality, Pinkert said. The museum is also eyeing longer-range expansion plans. But Pinkert's ambitions extend outside his institution.

"Having a brand, having a plan, has to improve the prospects, not just for people who depend on visitors," he said. "It is something that lifts all boats."

Located east of downtown across President Street, Jonestown was one of the earliest settlements in Maryland, founded by the same immigrant farmer who gave his name to the Jones Falls. In the 19th century, the area was home to Mary Pickersgill, who sewed the flag that inspired the "Star-Spangled Banner," as well as thriving immigrant and Jewish communities whose imprints remain with synagogues and delis.

It has also been marked by experiments in urban renewal, with tenements razed in the postwar period to make way for the 13-story Flag House Courts public housing projects. They were demolished in 2001, after falling victim to disrepair and violence and replaced with the Albemarle Square mixed-income housing development, erected in 2005.

The area today is a mix of owned and rental homes, industrial buildings and museums, a northern border to the flourishing Little Italy and Harbor East. The logo — an American flag modified with references to the area's history with the tagline "Proudly we hail" — is supposed to foster a sense of neighborhood cohesion and steer outsiders past negative associations, said Tom McGilloway, a principal at Mahan Rykiel Associates, a Baltimore

landscape architecture firm that worked with South Carolina's Arnett Muldrow & Associates on the plan.

Jonestown has "kind of been fractured over the years for a number of reasons, and since the Albemarle Square has been built ... the community as a whole has never really developed this overall identity," McGilloway said. "They need to kind of take control of their identity or else the negative identity will take control of them."

Jonestown shares a name with the settlement in Guyana where a mass murder-suicide took place under American cult leader Jim Jones in the late 1970s.

Jonestown has had just three shootings since 2010, compared to more than 20 in nearby Oldtown, according to Baltimore City crime data based on victims' reports. But the neighborhood still suffers from crimes such as car break-ins, with more than 700 reported since 2010, about 200 more than in Little Italy. "The basic problem with most places in Baltimore City is feeling safe," said Dwight Warren, executive director of the McKim Community Association on East Baltimore Street in the neighborhood. "That needs to come first."

Warren, who grew up in the Lafayette Courts housing project, which was dynamited in 1995, and has worked at the McKim Center since 1967, said he worries that efforts to improve the neighborhood will price out low-income residents. Others said they want to see open space reserved as park area for the neighborhood's children.

But Warren said he supports the effort, hoping that redevelopment, as well as increased tourism, improves quality of life, creates jobs and builds a sense of history.

"Everyone should benefit from that," he said, "When you say Jonestown to probably 80 percent of the folks around here, it's 'Jones-what? Where?' They've been overlooked."

As part of the master plan, institutions and community members have reorganized Historic Jonestown Corp. to act as a nonprofit advocate for the plan's implementation and the neighborhood.

Those involved are trying to figure out ways to fund the group, including considering a special tax district, said president Lindsay Thompson, who moved to Jonestown from Roland Park in 2005 and is a professor at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, where she teaches a class focused on the neighborhood.

Pinkert and others said their institutions have not yet committed any money to the plan, but they expect it to help with fundraising, as well as guide their priorities.

"It's amazing how willing funders are when they know you've got a road map and you've got goals laid out for you, especially when those goals are going to contribute to the betterment of the whole," said Paula Hankins, executive director of Carroll Museums Inc., which oversees the Shot Tower and Carroll Mansion nearby on East Lombard Street.

Already some development is starting to take shape. The Ronald McDonald House Charities of Baltimore Inc. plans to break ground next year on a new, \$20 million-\$25 million five-story 55,000-square-foot facility that will replace its current location, and the city has promised improvements to McKim Park as part of that project.

On Wednesday, the city's Board of Estimates approved the sale of 1107 E. Fayette St. for \$180,000, a deal that was approved by the Baltimore Development Corp. in 2013. The sale is connected to the \$45 million conversion of the former Hendler Creamery into 270 apartments by The Commercial Group, which purchased the property for \$1.1 million in 2012.

Efforts to redevelop the other vacant parcels, which remain publicly owned, have been hindered by deed restrictions that give the developers of Albemarle Square rights to shape future land use there, officials said.

About six months ago, the Baltimore Housing Authority restarted negotiations with Urban Atlantic, Albemarle's lead developer, in hopes of removing the deed restrictions and issuing a new request for proposals, officials said. Urban Atlantic, a Bethesda firm, did not respond to a request for comment.

"There's always concern about giving up control but we think we're moving forward with them in a good way at this point and do expect to be able to get this done," said Peter Engel, a deputy commissioner at Baltimore Housing. Pinkert said he expects implementation of the plan to proceed in stages, with more activities in the neighborhood a first sign of success. A new banner with the logo welcoming people to Jonestown was installed last week.

Some of the advocacy appears to be paying off. The map in the most recent version of the Visit Baltimore visitors' guide circles the Jonestown name in red and a spokeswoman there, while she did not respond directly to questions asking what prompted the change, said she expects further updates when a new guide is released in January.

"Every piece is dependent on all the other pieces," Pinkert said. "Having a sense of where we're going not just this year and next year, but the direction we're going in five or 10 years is really useful."

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