Cherry Hill Joins National Network of Purpose Built Communities in Transformation

BACKGROUNDER

Cherry Hill is located across the Patapsco River’s Middle Branch—about 300 acres just South of the Hanover St. bridge—from the Federal Hill neighborhood and downtown Baltimore. Over the years since its founding in the early 1940s, the community has produced a host of prominent lawmakers, educators, entertainers, along with a sense of pride equal to any one of Baltimore's unique neighborhoods. Growing up in Cherry Hill has meant growing up in a “village” where families come together to raise their next generation.

The story of Cherry Hill begins, however, in America’s racist past. It was one of America's first planned, segregated, Black communities. Racist attitudes and policies like restrictive covenants, redlining, a segregated schools at the time were central to the decision to build housing for returning World War II Black veterans—somewhere other than near white communities.

So, Cherry Hill was born on the undeveloped, undesirable, polluted southern waterfront atop a “potters field” (indigent burial ground). Most of the 600 new units were public housing—for rent, not to own. (For nakedly racist reasons, Blacks did not benefit from the GI bill, which provided low-interest loans and free college education and job training to white veterans.)

The community of some 8,000 residents faces many challenges.

There now are 3,100 housing units in the community, 85 percent of which are rentals, and 1,394 of those units are public housing—the City’s largest concentration of public housing.

Approximately 55 percent of households earn less than $25,000 per year. Grocery options are limited as is public transportation. Only 36 percent of adults have a high school diploma. All of the children are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Historically, students have performed well below statewide averages. Data from 2019 shows that 5 percent were proficient in reading and 3 percent were proficient in math. Despite significant 40 percent improvement since 2009, Baltimore’s Black infant mortality rates remain higher than for whites and premature deaths among Black residents are at a ratio of 1.8 to 1 for white residents.

The past 80 years of inequity, under investment, and systemic obstacles have prevented the community from achieving its potential. Yet Cherry Hill residents and community leaders have set forth their vision for the future in the 2020 Cherry Hill Transformation Plan, which today forms the basis for a community-led, holistic, place-based strategy to create a thriving Cherry Hill.

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