

# Fell's Point Out of Time



## Peter Cavaluzzi interview, March 12, 2004

*Jacque Greff, interviewer; Kraig Greff, camera*

### [Jacquie]

Ok, so if you could start out just by introducing yourself and who you are and how you came to do this, before you go into your discussion.

### [Peter]

My name is Peter Cavaluzzi. I am a design principal here at Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects. And I've got probably about 20 years of experience working in cities, large scale projects, where we have an expertise bringing new projects into existing neighborhoods in historic areas and particularly into water fronts. So, my specialty as an architect really doesn't focus exclusively on a single building per say. It's really about how you can bring growth, and how you can bring a series of development opportunities to an existing area. That's really the expertise.

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So, having said that, let me just take you through some analysis that we have made with regards to a project called Harbor Point in Baltimore. And how we begin to look at a project like that, and learn from the existing neighborhoods and existing areas as a way to generate an idea about how we can create a project that is sensitive, that will fit in, at the same time it will also meet current market needs. You have to create designs that aren't pie in the sky that can actually be built and that developers can finance them. But at the same time, you want them to fit in, be a positive, sort of addition to an area.

And for Harbor Point what we did is we focused on the 2 nearby neighborhoods Harbor East and Fells Point. In our analytic process, we just sort of looked at what's most obvious to us in these neighborhoods. Harbor East is a neighborhood that has less building coverage. It has taller buildings. It has a lot of public open space, wide streets. It has a water edge street. It has a very, sort of, grid-like nature to the overall development.

Whereas Fells Point is quite different. It's an area that has high building coverage. All the blocks are pretty much filled up. The streets are small. The buildings in general are much lower. The streets are much smaller. There's a central main street, which is Broadway, but another street Thames Street, which is the waterfront street, which has really been of interest to us – really are the main streets within the area. There's a minimum of views from the upland to the waterfront, and one of the things that we sort of discovered again, that's sort of like right there in front of you, but you don't realize it until you sort of just look at it very plainly. And that is to say that most of the larger buildings in Fells Point are actually right on the water's edge and all of the smaller buildings are upland. So, looking at all of those characteristics, we began to look at Fells Point in much more detail because I

think at the end of the day we felt that Fells Point, first of all, was an area that we needed to really be sensitive to in terms of the design and how we fit in with Fells Point, and at the same time there's a lot of value in Fells Point. There's a lot of charm, a lot of character. It's a one-of-a-kind place. If there are any design clues and ideas that we could get, we'll probably be more successful finding them in Fells Point than we will in other places that are nearby.

So, with that we started to do an analysis, and this is something that we, as a firm, commonly do and is unique to our firm – we did an analysis of the key street being Thames Street, the waterfront street, and we discovered again, sort of, looking at it plainly, you look at the street and you just draw the street and you realize that Thames Street is a street like no other street in the world. It's got varied blocks. It's got angles and twists and turns. No two blocks are the same. There's always changing views, changing buildings. And so, we really like that character and we really think that the nature of Thames Street is really much of what the, sort of, the gold and the value that exists in Fells Point. So, if we could learn from that, and, perhaps, extent that kind of characteristic onto Harbor Point, we think we'd be setting ourselves up to have a much better development that would be a natural outgrowth of Fells Point.

When you look at other elements of Thames Street you look directly on the water's edge you if you again just draw the single thing that you're focused on here being the water and the water edge you find that the water edge of Fells Point is very distinguished. It has a whole variety of piers and water bodies and water shapes and you can see that this entire water edge was one that was really driven by what takes place in the water. And that's something that we also I think have pioneered in all of our designs and in all of our waterfront work. When we come to an area and think about adding an area, we really look at the water first as the clues to develop a water plan, because we believe all the activities in the water, those are the things that will inform the land plan. So, if you could come up with a water plan first, it will greatly influence and greatly determine what makes sense on the upland areas. And if you look again at Thames Street in Fells Point, you see there's many different kinds of conditions, many different kinds of water places that we can learn from and build from.

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And most notably you compare it to Harbor Point; you see that Harbor Point is a result of the clean-up that had taken place in the water edge that had been put into place. It's very different from what Fells Point has in terms of a water edge. And we think that the, we've kind of characterized the Harbor Point edge as being somehow feeling suburban, sort of saying that almost in a negative way, in that we'd like to in view some of the characters and qualities that exist that of Fells Point into the development at Harbor Point.

The next issue that we began to think about in thinking about adding to the water edge and building this kind of more articulated water edge with piers and other water front structures. This idea of the buildings being bigger at the edge, and again just taking that idea, that single idea and drawing it, you realize that in fact that's very true in Fells Point – all of the biggest edges all the biggest buildings are directly off of Thames Street right along the water. And we feel that a pattern can be established where you continue that idea of bringing the bigger buildings to the water edge and make them part of a family of buildings that exist at the edge.

Now, I say that in the context that, from the development standpoint, obviously developers are interested in building buildings. They make their money by building buildings, and usually bigger buildings that are more modern buildings than typically take place in other cities. And this was a way for us to begin to think about ... knowing that the buildings would be coming in and that they would be a big program, it gives us a way to think about, it gives us a design and arrange those buildings in a way that makes them feel like at least they have some relationship to what is taking place on the water edge in Fells Point. So that was really the purpose of this drawing and this analysis is again to understand the shapes, the sizes, the layout of those buildings and to begin to take some of the DNA that we learn about in Fells Point and begin to bring that over to Harbor Point.

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If you look at the Harbor today, this is a photograph across the harbor looking back at Fells Point and you can see again, most of the big buildings in Fells Point do exist directly at the water's edge. There's a lot of variety in that skyline that's created at the water's edge. And we seek to learn from that again and bring that more into what we're going to be doing at Harbor Point. And this is another drawing that we use to look at it more on, sort of, a larger scale from the whole harbor. And it's not only something we could say is exclusively a characteristic of Fells Point, but in fact all around the Inner Harbor you'll find that the larger buildings and the sort of most varied waterfront structures are existing on that edge. And we can learn a lot from those structures as a way to fitting in to Harbor Point.

And this is just several photographs of those buildings – some new, some existing that used to be factories and now have been converted. The old City Pier that's really, sort of, the central focus of the Broadway and sort of the heart of Fells Point. The Domino Sugar Factory, which is sort of a city icon with the big sign and the big buildings. All of those things I think people would say do contribute and there are characteristics that we could learn from them as a way of seeing how we can more properly and more sensitively bring new buildings onto the waterfront at Harbor Point.

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We also look to history quite a bit to begin to develop our ideas for our design and, I guess, when we do look to history we don't look to history to replicate. We're not about actually replicating existing old buildings as part of new development. In fact, if you're familiar with the standards for preservation, the state historic preservation officer has guidelines on how one, or an architect, or a developer would add to an existing historic structure. And one of the things they talk about is if you are adding you should make your designs and your buildings distinctively different from that which is historic because they believe that that's the proper way to respond in the historic area. That isn't to say to do something that is totally foreign and overwhelms or whatever, but there is much more of an idea not trying to replicate or falsely replicate history. Really show the evolutions of buildings that takes place over time and fit in in other ways that make it feel like it's a natural growth of the city. And we look to history and many of the drawings and etchings and maps that we find at various waterfronts for cues as to how we might do that. And we look at all of these maps that jumped right at us is the fact that, in years past, the Harbor was much more industrial and much more directly tied to the waterfront than you might think it is today. Tons of boats, tons of structures on the water, lots of piers... The city and the waterfront were completely wed and integrated. And I think over the years there was a bit of a pullback from the waterfront, and I think we think that the notion of

bringing the city right to the water's edge gave a lot more vibrancy and life to the Harbor. And we think that's something that we can include in Harbor Point and learn from the historic photos.

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So, all of that being said our process really, sort of, ends with, what we call, sort of, a principal's drawing and what it really is is taking all of those elements that we look at individually – the street, the water edge, the piers, the buildings – all of those individual insights and then begin to bring them together in a cohesive diagram helps begin to start the architectural design process. We came to a diagram here that basically shows how Thames Street, as the primary main street of Fells Point, extending directly onto Harbor Point, and coming to a wonderful new public space that's going to have a terrific view over the harbor looking to the Inner Harbor as well as the Outer Harbor. The water edge that is varied and has many more places for boats to interact with the land, as well as the introduction of new pier buildings which will be sized in a way and designed in a way to reflect the character and nature of Fells Point, but at the same time be able to be marketed and be utilized in a more modern society in modern day where we could attract tenants.

And then within the development itself, the notion of this is just a natural extension of the city, we were totally focused on open spaces. We have a series of key open spaces, the Warf, the Piers, the dock, key streets like new Thames Street, Will Street. It's all about creating this public realm which we think in many ways the focus should be far less on buildings and much more on the development of those terrific public environments, because that is, in fact, what makes up a terrific new neighborhood.

So, those are really the key components to all of our ideas as it relates to Harbor Point. And this is a process that we use throughout the country. And we do have a specialty of waterfronts and we think, again, taking the time to not bring in any preconceived ideas or anything that really doesn't fit in and really taking the time to spend learning about a place and doing the, sort of, analysis of looking at things very simply and plainly, we think leads to unique, imaginative, and sensitive design ideas for waterfronts.

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### **[Jacquie]**

Talk a little bit about... apparently at one point Baltimore put in this urban renewal plant and they had this concept of having a pedestrian walkway all around the Harbor, and coupled with that was the idea that you would have low-rising buildings near the water, "people-sized buildings", someone's called them, and then the high buildings back a ways. And if you look at Inner Harbor it's probably something like that, I think. What are the tradeoffs and thought processes that would lead you to do a different approach, which is what you're talking about having the bigger buildings on the water, and have you looked at how people interact with the water differently in those situations?

### **[Peter]**

I would say that I'd answer the question in 2 ways. One way, is the fact that our process, in addition to analysis, relies heavily on precedent. I would say that there's no set rule or formula that one can apply universally to any city or any development. I think that the idea of buildings generally being lower at the water's edge I think is based upon, in many ways, its root is probably more about

people being afraid of change, as it is really the reality of those buildings being too big or not fitting in. I think that there are plenty of instances where a design for smaller buildings at a water's edge can be appropriate and can be terrific, and can be the right way to go. I think, conversely there are many instances where not following that is, sort of, a generally understood rule of good waterfront design. There are many waterfronts across the world where bigger buildings and bigger development is located at the water's edge and they're wonderful, successful developments successful neighborhoods.

Point of fact, recently in New York City the Planning Department just rewrote all of their waterfront zoning for some, I think it's 27 miles of waterfront that exists in the New York City area. And part of that zoning includes the notion that taller buildings being at the water edge not only contribute to the notion of having a skyline and making more of a striking silhouette at the water's edge, but it also ... there's also a thought that if the buildings were taller that they will contribute more at the landmark level in terms of creating, sort of, a distinctive waterfront edge. And I think in our experience, particularly in Baltimore, there was a lot of sentiment, in addition to the comment that you made earlier, there's a lot of sentiment that people had that they felt that Baltimore needed to make more of a statement. They needed to have something that they can be proud of and have a design that really, sort of, put them on the map. And they would always reference places like Sidney Opera House and other things...

**[Jacquie]**

So you're not building the Sydney Opera House anywhere there?

**[Peter]**

We took the approach that there's opportunities for wonderful, individual buildings to take place within a larger, more coordinated plan. I think we would believe that the whole site can really function as being somewhat of an icon and somewhat of a landmark design, if we carefully plan it and carefully coordinate all of the new development in a way that it all works together and creates, a new image and striking image for the waterfront at the Inner Harbor. So, that was, sort of, our point of view.

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**[Jacquie]**

The design that you've contemplated, does that allow people to walk around the whole waterfront or do these buildings cut off the opportunity for pedestrian walkways?

**[Peter]**

No, I think that that is one thing that is consistent throughout Baltimore, and mostly throughout America, and probably the world is that access to the waterfront is an imperative. So, even if you have small or tall buildings or big buildings or small buildings, we always try to create great places at the water edge. And this particular design, in addition to having great parks right at the water's edge, there is a continuous promenade that encircles the entire site, so that at any given time 24 hours a day, the public can have access to all parts of the waterfronts. So, we really view it as adding to the inventory of terrific waterfront environments that are completely accessible to the public.

**[Jacquie]**

Now, how wide is the promenade, generally?

**[Peter]**

The city has a minimum standard of 20 feet that they would like to maintain throughout, and I think that there are only a few spots on the whole plan where we're at the 20 foot mark. Most of the areas are quite a bit larger than that, and that isn't to say that, sort of, to excuse those areas where have 20 feet, I think, if you've ever been to many of the European fronts, many of the most successful waterfront edges are quite small and intimate. And it's not size, really, it's more the quality and the type of spaces that are created are the most important. And that they be accessible.

**[Jacquie]**

Now, what did you say, this is a European approach or is it, and does this approach have roots...

**[Peter]**

I wouldn't dub it a European approach. I would say that if there is the label of European that one would put to this, it is that Europe is, in general a much older place and there's a much greater sensitivity and appreciation for urbanism in cities. I think that, to that regard, the developer and the design team has such a love and interest in great urban places, that we would look at Fell Point and the surrounding neighborhoods and try to understand them in that fashion, and get our cues and our design ideas from that, as a way to development an approach for Harbor Point.

**[Jacquie]**

Any other thoughts on the waterfront design, anything that we haven't talked about?

**[Peter]**

I would say this. Just a, sort of, a statement about Baltimore. I can say this and sound maybe that I'm bragging, and maybe I am a bit, but our firm and I personally worked on waterfronts around the world and especially around America, and Baltimore, I think is the birthplace of the modern, urban waterfront. Wherever we go, whatever city we work in, we always at some part of the presentation bring up Baltimore, do analysis of what Baltimore did and how it might apply to a certain city, and how the development was arranged in Baltimore and the success story that really has taken place in Baltimore, where they were really able to bring the city back. I think that there is a lot more that can happen but I think in general, we regard it as, sort of, the birthplace of the modern, American, urban waterfront. So, as a final statement some of the comments that you hear from the public and the neighbors in the area and they sort of feel self-conscious that maybe Baltimore isn't as sophisticated, or hasn't succeeded in developing wonderful landmarks, their architecture isn't what they would like it to be... And I say, maybe there are some points that are being made there, but I would say that I don't think that people fully realize the impact and the importance that Baltimore has on my generation of architects, and I'm sure for many future generations as we go forward and rediscover more and more of the city and the waterfront.

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**[Jacquie]**

[Brief discussion of formstone – Peter hadn't heard of it.]

The Rec Pier ... the City Pier... That building's been empty for years and years and there's been long battles and struggles. It needs four to eight million dollars to shore it up, and where is that money coming from, and Baltimore doesn't have the money. Still, there's a desire it should be public space, and there's a desire that it shouldn't extend it's current footprint, and it shouldn't go up much higher than it is. And what do you do with this? Because this is a wonderful buildings and it's not being used at all. The last use was Homicide.

So, one of the ideas that's being tossed around right now is a performing arts center. So, my question to you, I know you're not an expert in this field but you've looked at a lot of cities and inner cities and waterfronts and things – what kinds of use might work well in this, you know, kind of off the record, personal, not as a professional having come in necessarily? Is there a synergy like ... one of the things I've always said about New York is the jazz clubs, you know, there's enough of them so people can walk around until people come to them and they build on each other. So, there're not really in competition, and they're really helping each other?

**[Peter]**

I haven't thought about it directly so, what I'm going to tell you is off the top of my head. I think the notion of, first of all, to reuse it, absolutely. I think the sooner it can acquire a new use and bring more life and activity to that part of the waterfront I think would be a positive right now. It's, sort of, a little bit of a blank spot on the waterfront and I think although it's a cherished landmark I think we need to infuse it with some life.

That being said, I think that you also have to understand the realities of redevelopment. We just completed the renovation and restoration of the second largest train station in the country, which is in Kansas City, Union Station, Kansas City. We restored the station and put some restaurants in there and we built a science museum with it. Thankfully, the way it was funded through a bistate acts between Missouri and Kansas, the first in history that was ever done, to fund the redevelopment of this building. So, we succeeded in that. The building's operating, it's beautiful. The science museum is an attraction but, you know, it really doesn't cover the costs of keeping that building vibrant and a part of the city. And I think that the public needs to understand that there is a balancing act that needs to take place, and that is between keeping something as a cherished landmark and at the same time understanding that you need to give it a use that's a viable that will keep it going in perpetuity.

And so I think the notion of a performing arts center is great. My initial reaction depending upon how much of a performing arts center it would be, it might overwhelm in terms of traffic, if you have a major event there, and you bring all of these people in then it might be a little much. I think though, a mix, perhaps, of a performance venue, some cultural venue, and some private development, as well I think are all viable ways to redevelop the Pier. I think, in many ways, at the end of the day again, you need to look at the water and you need to think, how can we make a new arrival place from the water to Fells Point, and learn from that a bit and see how that might influence the thinking of what might that Pier become.

And then secondly, I think you need to look at Fells Point itself and say, you know what? The end of the day has to be like Fells Point. And Fells Point to me is residential. It's commercial. It's entertainment. And maybe at the end of the day some, sort of, mix of those kinds of components is the appropriate reuse. But I think you can't lose sight of fact that it has to somehow respond to the market. It has to somehow be developed in a way that it can sustain itself over the long haul.  
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**[Jacquie]**

Now, one question going back to kind of what you said before, your focus is on the water and connecting with the water and using the water. The water is used today much differently than the water was. I had one of the people we interviewed was the environmental manager at the Baltimore Soap Plant P&G's Tide Point and he talked about how – They used it for effluent... They used it for cooling water... They used it for process water... They used it for shipping... The uses today are very different. So, how do you see the water being used today?

**[Peter]**

Well, I think in many ways, I know that in many cities, too, there's always this concern that the original, sort of, historic waterfront work and jobs are changing. And I think, as difficult as that is on the waterfront as well as any other part of the city in any other sector, change is inevitable. I think that in this instance, the new uses in many ways are far better. There were a lot of environmental problems with the way the water was being used in the past. I think that more of the contemporary uses, such as the water taxis and the more recreational elements... And then still mixing in some of the existing industrial uses, I think are all of the ingredients that are going to a more vibrant mixed-use harbor. So, I think you want all those things. Minus what, back in the early days the more hazardous, harmful uses. We're glad that that's gone. And we're also glad that this idea of having access to all of the water no matter what the uses are, I think is also a good positive development for the waterfront.

**[Jacquie]**

Any other thoughts? Otherwise I think we're done.

Thank you!

**[Peter]**

I think that's it!