

'Very Pedestrian Building'?

In the widening debate over the city's intent to subsidize H&S redevelopment of the former Allied Signal chromium site, newly called Harbor Point. The Sun repeatedly locates it "midway between Harbor East and Fell's Point"--but Harbor Point IS Fell's Point, and has been since William Fell in 1734 obtained the property that is now this community. Documentation is in University of Maryland emeritus law professor Garrett Power's painstaking track of early city land sales in the summer 1993 Maryland Historical Society Magazine. The earliest plats, referring to Fells Prospect, nevertheless label as Fells Point the tip jutting west into the Patapsco River.

By the 1850s, though, the growing chrome plant began taking over the peninsula, which

became an outlier to what is now Fell's Point. When

Beatty Development Group
Tower's financing at issue.



Interstate highways threatened in the 1960s, two developments critical to its survival--designation as a federal historic district and inclusion in U.S.-financed Urban Renewal planning--excluded the true Point. Its survival was left to another federal effort,

begun in 1989: restoration, under a consent decree, of this "brown field" fouled by the chrome, one of the largest such undertakings.

Now comes the sole remaining big Fell's Point industry, H&S--the bakery, but lately known for its development arm, builder of Harbor East--to raise a 23-floor regional headquarters for the Chicago company that bought Constellation Energy. A rendering of the building has drawn mixed reviews. Councilman Jim Kraft, who generally has supported the project, termed it "a very pedestrian building." David Manfredi of Boston is the designer and Todd Harvey the architect of record. His firm is Beatty Harvey of Baltimore, the former being the father of Michael Beatty, president of Beatty Development Group, the offshoot of H&S Develop- (Continued)



Photos by Lew Diuguid
Landscape architect asks: Why not widen the walks?

Super Sidewalk Needs a Sprightlier Step--Pt. I

By David Speer
Landscape architect and 4-year resident

Perhaps Baltimore's most urbane sidewalk experience is found here on the one long block of Thames St. between Broadway and Ann St. The historic atmosphere, the architecture of the old taverns, the Belgian block pavement and waterfront views make a stroll interesting and fun. It's not only historic, of course. The night life, wide variety of food and live music are attractive to adults of all ages. Usually one of the most crowded sidewalks in the city, the people-watching is eye-catching, night and day. The eateries and shops, built along only one side, face south to the waterfront and the sun--a postcard-worthy scene.

Still, this stretch of sidewalk should be so much better. I am astonished that it has not been rebuilt already. Redesign and funding for the Thames block expansion should be the focus of any Fell's Point redevelopment plan. Talk has swirled for 5 years about the plans, timetable, and money to rebuild the adjacent Broadway Square. Far more pedestrians use the Thames sidewalk than the Square--a nice enough open space, surrounded by historic buildings, taverns, shops. But the Square will remain an unspectacular urban flex-space until freed of the automobiles that surround it. That should be the subject of another debate. The point I'm making here is that the more important 1700 block of Thames St. is in urgent need of a thoughtful makeover.

Any such project must reconfigure and widen the sidewalks on both sides. The street space dedicated to two lanes of traffic is at least 15 feet wider than necessary, and the sidewalks are far too skinny. The existing narrow brick walk along restaurant row cannot begin to accommodate comfortably outdoor tables, throngs of pedestrians, trees, street lights, and dog walkers. How fortunate to have enough existing width within Thames St. to widen the walks without compromising parking, traffic safety, or truck deliveries. So what on earth is the delay?

The solution is simple. I'm sure I'm not the first to suggest that the sidewalk along the restaurants be widened considerably, and the street be reduced in width. The opportunity for more outdoor table area is obvious, and would prove (Continued)

Happenings

No Fell's Pointer in August

The staff of this otherwise monthly newsletter vacations in August. Look for us next on Sept. 14, always the second Saturday of the month. The editor hopes readers will submit articles on topics we have missed. The bedrock of The Fell's Pointer, its distributors, need a few new feet. The job involves half an hour on the second Saturday of each month, distributing door to door. Please reach Jacquie Greff, jacquie@TonalVision.com or 410.675.0591.

Another Entry in 46th District

Liam Davis, neighborhoods liaison for City Council President Jack Young, has declared his candidacy for the House of Delegates in next year's Democratic primary. The south Baltimore resident's announcement follows that of Fell's Point resident Brooke Lierman in The Fell's Pointer last month. The 46th District incumbents are Pete Hammen, Brian McHale and Luke Clippinger.

Union Wharf on Bumpy Wolfe

The Residents' Association held its June 5 meeting as guests in Bozzuto Group's Union Wharf almost completed apartment building at the foot of Wolfe St., seemingly pleased with it but for two exceptions: the set-back rooftop parking structure, lacking brick but with multiple glaring lights, and revelation that no major improvement is expected of the street itself. Always an obstacle course of rails and ill-fitted Belgian blocks, Wolfe deteriorated further beneath the heavy construction equipment. The Bozzuto team took all complaints under advisement while noting that the city is responsible for the street. The city has shown no sign of accepting paternity.



Mazurek Remains a Polish Pillar

The May Fell's Pointer account of this community's dwindling Polish long-timers inadvertently omitted a stalwart, Andy Mazurek, who with his wife Joann operated a bed & breakfast next door to them on S. Ann St. for 25 years until their recent retirement. He was born in a stable on Lancaster St. around the corner in 1943 of a second generation Polish family here--his grandfather a longshoreman, boatman and Prohibition-era rum runner. Joann's origins were German.

"Most of my family were longshoremen," said Andy, including his father. "Poles couldn't get other work. But my grandfather said it was too dangerous." So Andy signed on as an apprentice at Local 16 of the Iron Workers Union in Dundalk, becoming a steel erector, a bridge man, one of the world's more notoriously dangerous trades. "For 31 years I helped erect the steel that Sparrows Point produced," Mazurek added. He still goes to the union's bull and oyster roasts, but the one-time membership of 650 is down to 400, he said, reminiscing about jobs that were truly highlights.

"You know the WJZ TV tower on 83? It was 800 feet tall until we raised it to 1,300 in the 1970s." His crew worked on both bay bridges and was aloft building the Delaware Memorial Bridge in 1966 when nine carpenters were killed while removing forms from a newly poured footing--the still-fluid cement collapsed upon them. His own crew was mostly foreign-born, including Poles, and several American Indians, who have been lionized for derring-do in constructing N.Y. skyscrapers. Andy said his Indian colleagues were like the rest, and their presence was something of a dodge, avoiding taxes by maintaining residence back on the reservation while following jobs. "But then, it's their country," Andy added.

The Mazureks' house offers a compressed history of the Fell's Point renaissance. Andy's grandmother bought it about the time he was born and he was raised there. But when the city committed to pushing through the Interstate interchange in the '70s it condemned the entire block, forcing them out. With defeat of the road, though, the city offered the ousted owners first claim at repurchase. "It had been boarded up for 12 years," he said. We were the only family that moved back in" as the neighborhood transformation began. When the house next door was not reclaimed, the couple was able to buy it and create the B&B that attracted worldwide visitors. They are restoring it to a single dwelling for sale.

Joann married Andy at St. Stans, which is no longer up the block. She is a cat owner, long-standing 'Pointer deliverer and keeper of Ann St. cleanliness, and she has this admonition for the younger generation of pup walkers, often new to the streets: It's good that you clean up after your dogs, but don't deposit the waste in our block's recycling bins. That's not their purpose.

Pedestrian Building - cont. from front

ment that controls the entire 27-acre site.

The mayor has agreed to provide \$107 million through bonds for infrastructure. Also, Beatty would obtain \$53 million in tax write-offs as part of an Empowerment Zone, normally designed to benefit low-income areas. The zone was gerrymandered to include another dislocated piece of Fell's original property--what is now Perkins Homes public housing--according to Councilman Carl Stokes. He says the tax savings should go to Perkins. The city denies any subterfuge. Beatty says that public financing is needed to offset high construction costs atop the capped chrome, and that generation of property taxes will far exceed the city's current outlays.



Mazureks tend their garden, and Ann St.

Super Sidewalk - cont. from front

immediately successful. Designers of the wider sidewalk must also provide ample room for big shade trees, preferably in large unbroken planting areas instead of small square tree pits in the sidewalk. Shade trees will minimize the need for individual table umbrellas, reducing visual clutter. The cooling shade trees will also slow storm-water runoff. Reducing the amount of pavement is always a solid environmental move in urban areas, especially so close to the harbor. Thames deserves large trees along both sides of the street to unify the block--trees that branch high, so as not to obstruct viewers walking, riding or seated in restaurants.

Designers must not forget about the other side of Thames, and the potential that sidewalk offers directly on the waterfront. The walk from the Water Taxi past moldering Recreation Pier, on to Ann Street Wharf is a skinny disaster in an incredibly great spot--cluttered with out-of-place flowering tree pits, street lamps, trash cans, sign posts, guardrails, and parking-fee stands. Its renovation should not wait for the Pier's promised conversion to a hotel, now 10 years in the waiting. This sidewalk is part of the city's waterfront Promenade, located in a prime zone of activity, and yet remains derelict. Design work should be done now. Consider both sides of the street as precious pedestrian zones that need to work together to ensure the unity of the historic neighborhood.

One of the great concerns for everyone will be the historic atmosphere of Thames St. The Belgian blocks tie the street scape together visually. Reusing the pavers will be a particularly difficult urban design problem, with great care needed to maintain the historic atmosphere while still complying with the Americans With Disabilities Act. We have all witnessed women in heels crossing the street and struggling mightily to keep their feet and their dignity. Few people in wheelchairs are seen in this neighborhood, as the pavers present serious obstacles. Bikers steer clear of them. The Disabilities Act mandates that the vertical difference between individual pavers be ¼ inch or less in crosswalks and sidewalks. There are no crosswalks for several blocks that meet the standards of modern building codes, and provide for everyone.

Solving these Belgian block re-use issues will take great attention to detail. We cannot replace the status quo, with Belgian Blocks everywhere, without compromising building codes and accessibility. Some streets in Harbor East re-used Belgian Blocks while introducing similarly colored smooth concrete bands of pavement, and designers can look there for guidance. The expanded sidewalks should remain brick and the rails in the middle of the street can linger on, too.

If the Thames sidewalk is not the best sidewalk in Baltimore, it can be.

NEXT: Some light on street lamps.

Free Rainwater Audit

Just as property owners are reeling from the news that we'll soon be taxed on our storm water runoff, some good news flows in via a presentation to the Residents' Association:

Blue Water Baltimore, a coalition of former watershed associations, will visit your home, school, church or business to perform a free water audit. It will look at your roof, landscape and anything that affects your property's impact on the harbor and the bay.

The information, which will not be shared with the government, will lead to recommendations that might include conservation landscaping, downspout disconnection, green roofs, pavement reduction, rain water harvesting, rain gardens, and tree planting. The group will help complete projects that reduce storm water runoff from your property, some of which may be eligible for financial incentives. It will also document these for possible tax reduction. For more information: dpuzey@bluewaterbaltimore.org or 410.254.1577 X106.

--David Johnson

Schedules

Trash and Recycling

Current days for trash pickup are Tuesdays and for recycling are Thursdays. Residents are limited to setting out three 32-gallon cans of waste between 6PM on Mondays and 6AM on Tuesdays.

Neighborhood Meetings

Douglass Place: Third Tuesday of each month at Bertha's, dlh411@gmail.com.

Antique Dealers' Association: Call 410.675.4776.

Community Organization: Second Tuesdays at 606 South Ann St., 443.791.1717.

Main Street: info@fellspointmainstreet.org or 410.675.8900.

Preservation Society: 410.675.6750 ext.16 or preservationsociety.com.

Residents' Association: First Wednesdays, 7PM, Bertha's.

thanks!

The all-voluntary Fell's Pointer thanks its four sustaining sponsors, One-Eyed Mike's Tavern, 708 S. Bond St., 410.327.0445; Duda's Tavern, Thames and Bond Sts., 410.276.9719; Howie B Properties, commercial and residential real estate in Fell's Point and throughout Baltimore, 410.375.4200; and Jimmy's Restaurant, 801 S. Broadway, 410.327.3273.

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Editor Lew Diuguid

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