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Baltimore: a city on the move

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On the way to Washington, D.C. one drives through a part of America's seventh largest city and, based upon the popular image of this city, there is no reason to stop in Baltimore. But if one does stop, he would be surprised and impressed by the dynamism of a city on the move.

The bumper stickers say "Baltimore is Best"; the advertisements claim that the city is "Big, Bold and Building for the Future"; and Mayor Schaefer states that "Baltimore wants you. We want your business, we want your family, we want your spirit and enthusiasm to join us in revitalizing a great city." And after a time, one believes the message and develops a sense of pride for this city. It is this pride which serves as a springboard for an energetic and vibrant city.

Nowhere is this new spirit more evident than in downtown Baltimore. The 33-acre Charles Center development in the heart of the downtown is awe-inspiring in its scale of \$182 million investment. Today only five of the original buildings are still standing. Started in 1959, Charles Center now boasts nine major new office buildings, 400 new apartments, a new 700 room hotel, three plazas, an 1800 seat theater and extensive underground parking. The number of jobs has doubled, and the tax value of the area has increased five-fold. And the beauty of the complex, with work by Mies van der Rohe and Pietro Belluschi, has captured architectural and design awards from the American Institute of Architects and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Authorities decided next that the waterfront needed a shot in the arm and through the use of the urban renewal mechanism, the 240-acre, \$490 million 30 year development plan for the harbor was unveiled by the city in 1964. Under development are a 30-story world trade center, a rebuilt shoreline with parks and a marina, and several other buildings. Also, a model urban neighborhood with 3,000 new dwellings is under construction.

The third major project for Metrocenter is the retail district next to the Charles Center where the new pedestrian mall on Lexington Street is being constructed and which will eventually be enclosed. A new subway will help increase retail activity in the downtown area. A new subway network scheduled for a 1981 opening will help increase retail activity in the downtown area.

The \$93 million Social Security Building, the source for 10,000 jobs for the downtown is under construction. Together with the newly completed courthouse, this federal contribution is only part of a joint private and public investment in the 1,000-acre city center which will total nearly \$1 billion by 1990.

This type of activity does not happen of its own accord, especially within older cities of the Northeast. It requires the joint efforts of public and private sectors. Baltimore is unusual in the way the business community responded to the need. They can claim much credit for the city's renaissance.

It was just over 20 years ago that the problem of center city revitalization was recognized here and, as a result, a group of 100 top executives from the business community was formed. Raising over \$300,000 of private money to put together a plan for downtown development, this Greater Baltimore Committee quickly realized that it was necessary to do a project quickly and well in order to stimulate further development: the Charles Center was the result. The city provided its legal powers and built the necessary services while the business community turned its attention to getting commercial development into the area. The management of the development became the responsibility of the Charles Center, a private organization headed by retired department store executive Jefferson Miller who was paid \$1 a year. The city paid all expenses of this fast moving and flexible catalyst which spurred the Center's development.

The city of Baltimore, recognizing the expertise and success of the Charles Center management group and the absence of bureaucratic red tape, formally contracted with the group in 1965 to expand its management to that of the Inner Harbor Project. This Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management, Inc. continues to conduct all negotiations for land disposition, supervising all design and construction of public facilities, and coordinating the activities of various city agencies and private developers. The corporation serves as liaison between city and private sector to get the job done. As chairman of the board Walter Sondheim says, "the corporation serves as government to the developer and as developer to the government."

A unique private, non-profit corporation, working together with a responsive city government, has brought a remarkable success to this city of 850,000. This achievement was recognized by the National League of Cities in 1977 when it chose Baltimore as an "All-America City."

This private entity has served as the catalyst for the resurgence of the downtown. It is a model that other cities, including Providence, should consider. But each city needs to discover its own magic ingredient to lead it back to a prominence it once held. Baltimore has found this elixir.

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