



CITY COUNCIL BILL: 23-0444

BILL REPORT

**CHARTER AMENDMENT – INNER HARBOR
PARK**

TO: The Honorable Nick Mosby, President, Baltimore City Council
FROM: Dana Petersen Moore, Director, Office of Equity and Civil Rights
THRU: Nina Themelis, Director, Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
ANALYST: Dana Petersen Moore
DATE: February 12, 2024
POSITION: **Favorable**

INTRODUCTION

The Office of Equity and Civil Rights (OECR) has reviewed and is herein reporting on City Council Bill 23-0444 – Charter Amendment – Inner Harbor Park. The bill repeals and re-ordains with amendments Article I, Section 9 of the Baltimore City Charter which defines the allowable uses for the Inner Harbor Park. Specifically, the bill seeks to allow the development of multifamily residential housing, and off-street parking. The bill also establishes the boundaries within which these stated purposes shall be allowed. As required by the Md. Constitution, Art. XI-A Sec. 5, an ordinance to amend the Charter must be approved by the voters. The bill provides that the amendment shall be submitted to the legal and qualified voters of Baltimore City for adoption or rejection.

HISTORY OF BALTIMORE’S INNER HARBOR AREA

Baltimore’s Inner Harbor was a major United States seaport in the 1800’s. However, because it was too shallow for large ships or heavy industry, the harbor was mainly used for shipbuilding, and oyster canning. The harbor was an industrial, working waterfront crammed with piers, warehouses, and wharves.

In 1904, most of Baltimore’s downtown area was destroyed by the “Great Baltimore Fire.” The Inner Harbor area survived and went on to become the site of industrial advances. For example, the Pratt Street Power Plant was built in the 1940’s, bringing electricity to Baltimore. And during World War II, the plant fulfilled the World War II demand for electricity to support war efforts. For much of the 1940’s and into the 1950’s, the harbor enjoyed a period of robust industry. But this did not continue.

Starting in the 1950’s and continuing into the 1960’s, the Inner Harbor area became increasingly marked by abandoned and neglected industrial properties. Vacant and neglected warehouses and piers were converted to substandard housing. The area came to be marked by problems of crime and pollution. Flooding was common.

Redevelopment efforts began in the 1960’s. With a primary goal of improving the area’s living conditions as well as the area’s environment, the harbor began to be redeveloped to attract more visitors and businesses. The area was steadily becoming a draw for recreation, culture, and



CITY COUNCIL BILL: 23-0444

BILL REPORT

CHARTER AMENDMENT – INNER HARBOR PARK

tourists. The opening of the World Trade Center, the National Aquarium, the Harbor Place Pavilions, and the Maryland Science Center solidified the Inner Harbor as an area for tourists and visitors. This growth continued.

Today, the Inner Harbor is central to Baltimore's tourism industry. It is a vibrant area with ample recreation spaces, quality housing that ranges from affordable to luxury, and vibrant businesses. It is a model for post-industrial waterfront redevelopment. The harbor and its parks, commercial businesses and venues are open to the public. The area is accessible by numerous modes of transportation. Importantly, the area is accessible for persons with disabilities.

The Inner Harbor offers numerous entertainment events and opportunities. New Year's Eve and Fourth of July fireworks both enjoy large attendance. The same can be said for the various festivals that are sited at the Inner Harbor. Seasonal events such as the "Holiday Makers Market/Christmas Village", ice skating rink, and "Fleet Week" draw similarly large numbers of visitors to the area. And on a day-to-day basis, perhaps one of the greatest aspects of Baltimore's Inner Harbor is its openness to all, the great diversity of people that visit the area, and the many options it offers to utilize the space.

HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

As noted by the report submitted by the Department of Planning, permitted uses of Baltimore's Inner Harbor and park area has been the subject of numerous legislative changes. The changes have been consistent in preserving and creating new uses that emphasize public access. Indeed, the most recent change, in 2016, sought to expand the public's use of the area by allowing for outdoor dining places.

ANALYSIS

The current bill is described as having a goal of adding residential building, and related parking. The presumption is that these uses will not be entirely for public access. Analyses by both the Department of Planning and the Department of Recreation and Parks suggest that even with the non-public changes that will occur should bill 23-0444 pass and then be voted favorably by Baltimore City voters, public space will be increased. This is an outcome that is consistent with the history of Baltimore's Inner Harbor, and its current role as Baltimore's major public destination.

The City Charter provides for the basic function of the City of Baltimore and its agencies. It is appropriate and necessary that the Baltimore Police Department and the basic structure of the



CITY COUNCIL BILL: 23-0444
BILL REPORT
CHARTER AMENDMENT – INNER HARBOR
PARK

Department is enshrined within the City Charter. This will ensure that no drastic changes can be made to the Inner Harbor Park without the consent of Baltimore City voters.

CONCLUSION

The Office of Equity and Civil Rights is grateful for the opportunity to review and report on City Council Bill 23-0444. As it appears that the purpose of the bill is to create needed additional housing for Baltimore City, and will increase public access to the area with no negative consequences for any demographic, the Office of Equity and Civil Rights supports a **favorable** committee report on City Council Bill 23-0444.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Petersen Moore
Chief Equity Officer
Director, Office of Equity and Civil Rights