

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 11-0275R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Clarke, Stokes, Branch, Conaway, Henry

Introduced and read first time: April 11, 2011

Assigned to: Urban Affairs and Aging Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Baltimore Development Corporation, Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, Planning Department

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Informational Hearing - The Preservation of Read's Drug Store and the Superblock**
3 **Development**

4 FOR the purpose of requesting the Baltimore Development Corporation and its partners in the
5 'Superblock' project to brief the Council on their efforts to acknowledge the first Civil
6 Rights sit-in at the Read's Drug Store on Lexington and Howard streets by preserving as
7 much of this historic building as possible; requesting the Baltimore City Commission for
8 Historical and Architectural Preservation and the Department of Planning's Urban Design
9 and Architectural Review Panel to update the Council on their involvement with the
10 Superblock project and specifically the Read's building; and inviting the coalition of
11 organizations advocating for the preservation of the Read's Drug Store building to educate
12 the Council on the importance of this Baltimore landmark.

13 **Recitals**

14 Baltimore is a city with both a long and rich history and a bright and hopeful future. Her past
15 has left her a veritable treasure trove of historic and architecturally significant structures.
16 Making good on the promise of her future requires that new buildings and infrastructure be
17 continually erected to meet the changing needs of the modern world. As Baltimore continually
18 grows toward tomorrow, it is important that the City stay true to itself, its people, and its history
19 by building on its heritage rather than just sweeping it aside to make way for the new.

20 One current instance where the twin goals of honoring our past and preparing for our future
21 appear to be in tension has arisen in the case of the redevelopment of the former site of the
22 Read's Drug Store chain's flagship store on the City's West Side. This building lies within the
23 footprint of the long delayed 'Superblock' project that many see as essential to the renaissance of
24 this once bustling neighborhood. However, one of the City's premier preservation societies,
25 Baltimore Heritage, calls this 76 year old building at the corner of Howard and Lexington the
26 site of one of the West Side's "least known but most important stories."

27 Baltimore Heritage explains:

28 Like many downtown commercial establishments in the early 1950s, the Read's chain maintained
29 a strict policy of racial segregation at their lunch counters. In 1955, a group of Morgan State
30 students came together with the leadership of the recently organized Baltimore Committee on
31 Racial Equality to organize a sit-in protest at the lunch counter of the Read's Drug Store at

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

Council Bill 11-0275R

1 Howard and Lexington Streets. They succeeded in this effort, marking this building as a witness to
2 the first successful student-led sit-in protest in Baltimore and defining a powerful model for the
3 more famous lunch-counter sit-in of Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960.

4 This early success story in our City's, and our nation's, long struggle for equality and Civil
5 Rights has not been celebrated as it should be. Today, the Read's Drug Store chain is just a
6 memory and the building that witnessed this historic moment has been neglected and allowed to
7 fall into such disrepair that developers' claim it is unusable for modern purposes in its present
8 state.

9 Still, past neglect should not serve as an excuse for continued inattention to the significance
10 of what happened at this site. The existing plans for West Side redevelopment apparently call
11 for the former Read's Drugstore to be destroyed without a trace. In light of the historical
12 importance of the events that occurred in this building, any construction that fails to memorialize
13 the 1955 sit-in would simply be inappropriate. Baltimore must not again forget this important
14 chapter in her history. Greater efforts must be made to marry this important part of the City's
15 past to our current efforts to build a better future for the West Side.

16 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That this
17 Council requests that the Baltimore Development Corporation and its partners in the
18 'Superblock' project brief the Council on their efforts to acknowledge the first Civil Rights sit-in
19 at the Read's Drug Store on Lexington and Howard streets by preserving as much of this historic
20 building as possible; requests the Baltimore City Commission for Historical & Architectural
21 Preservation and the Department of Planning's Urban Design and Architectural Review Panel to
22 update the Council on their involvement with the Superblock project and specifically the Read's
23 building; and invites the coalition of organizations advocating for the preservation of the Read's
24 Drug Store building to educate the Council on the importance of this Baltimore landmark.

25 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
26 President of the Baltimore Development Corporation, the Chair of the Baltimore City
27 Commission for Historical & Architectural Preservation, the Coordinator of the Department of
28 Planning's Urban Design and Architectural Review Panel, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison
29 to the City Council.