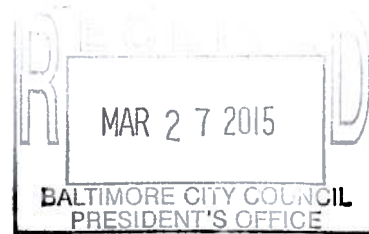


March 26, 2015

The Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council  
c/o Office of the City Council President  
100 N. Holliday St., Suite 400  
Baltimore, MD 21202



Re: *Council Resolution 15-0204R*

Dear Mr. President and City Council Members:

In its proposal to establish an African American Business, Tourism, Entertainment & Heritage Preservation Commission, Resolution 15-0204R raises a number of concerns including *tourism promotion, informational infrastructure* and *historic preservation*. Visit Baltimore whole heartedly agrees that Baltimore boasts a wealth of African American historical and cultural attractions including museums, monuments and historic sites. However, we would disagree with the Resolution's assertion that there are "limited opportunities for Baltimore small business to engage in the City's \$3-5 billion tourism industry;" and, furthermore, caution against claims of "disparity" or bias in the City's historic tourism commemorations and celebrations.

As the City's official tourism arm, Visit Baltimore dedicates significant efforts and budget dollars to raise awareness amongst visitors and locals alike about Baltimore's rich history and cultural heritage – including our great and unique African American story. As a membership-based organization, we also proactively engage Baltimore's tourism and hospitality community – including our WMBE (African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American) and small business community – in these promotional efforts and, in welcoming visitors when they are here. We are doing our job and doing it well. *Please see Appendix A for a summary of our multicultural sales and promotional efforts, diverse membership network, and recent successes in each the diversity meetings and leisure market.*

Of course, there is always more that could be done to promote our City's African American history for our residents and for visitors. In fact, Visit Baltimore is exploring ways to amplify our multicultural tourism message and local business participation. These include:

1. Creating a **Diversity Program** to offer ethnic or registered WMBE owned businesses located within Baltimore City a \$650.00 grant to cover one (1) year of membership to Visit Baltimore pending active participation in Visit Baltimore education programs and networking events.
2. Expanding the **Visit Baltimore Education & Training Foundation** (a publically supported 501(c)(3) organization). Launched in December 2014, the Foundation was founded to: a) promote workforce development in the tourism sector; and, b) initiate, facilitate and support heritage, cultural and/or multicultural tourism programs, events and public awareness campaigns. In keeping with our IRS-mandated \$50,000 budget cap (through 2016), the Foundation's initial efforts are focused on workforce development. This includes providing need- and merit-based scholarships to Baltimore City young people and residents. Beginning in 2017, we look forward to expanding our programmatic footprint including potential re-granting programs to benefit City heritage sites and initiatives.

However, we believe that forming a separately "staffed and funded" Commission with a tourism remit would duplicate and potentially dilute our existing efforts and new programs underway.

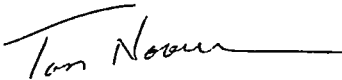
*unfavorable  
with comments*



Similarly, and while there is also always more that could be done to interpret (via way-finding, signage, markers, etc.) and preserve our African American (among other) historic sites, we would defer to our partner agencies and organizations already working tirelessly in this direction on how to best address these needs in the most efficient and effective ways. Not only do these agencies already have remits for such infrastructural upkeep and historic preservation; but also, they have the expertise and infrastructure in place to take immediate action

In conclusion, we would strongly caution against duplicating efforts and dedicating what we understand to be limited City funds to create a new African American Business, Tourism, Entertainment, & Heritage Preservation Commission. If there is a belief that there is a lack of representation or we or any of our partners are going in the wrong direction, work with us to make improvements. Clearly it makes fiscal sense and is in the most collaborative spirit to support the many strong organizations already in place and who are dedicated to celebrating, highlighting and preserving the full range of what Baltimore has to offer.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Noonan" followed by a horizontal line.

Tom Noonan  
President & CEO

Cc: Colin Tarbet  
Angela Gibson

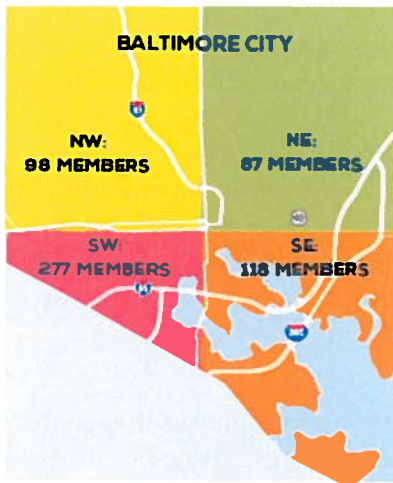


## Appendix A Visit Baltimore's Multicultural Outreach

Visit Baltimore directs significant effort and budget dollars to raise awareness amongst visitors and locals alike about Baltimore's rich history and cultural heritage – including our great African American story.

1. We promote Baltimore as a premier destination in the **diversity meetings market** by:
  - a. Attending tradeshows (e.g. *National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners, Diversity Marketplace, etc.*) to drive new business opportunities and network with key stakeholders; and,
  - b. Employing 2 FT salespeople dedicated to sourcing leads and selling Baltimore as a multicultural destination, as well as 1 FT salesperson dedicated to selling Baltimore to group and family reunions.
2. We promote Baltimore's **multicultural assets in the leisure market**:
  - a. In any given year, ~**30%** of our leisure marketing budget is spent on multicultural-specific advertising and outreach – promoting the City's history and heritage sites, arts and culture institutions and special events including the African American Festival.
  - b. Visit Baltimore also communicates cultural diversity in our general marketing campaigns. In this way, ~**45%** of our leisure advertising dollars reinforce Baltimore's multicultural tourism message and assets. We also engage 2 multicultural advertising agencies to provide their expertise in our African American and Hispanic outreach efforts.
3. Beyond multicultural advertising and media buys, **Visit Baltimore coordinates, produces, and offers a variety of multicultural tourism resources, programs and publications for visitors and locals alike.** These include:
  - a. **Baltimore.org** – the online home for everything Baltimore, including dedicated pages and promotions for our multicultural attractions, membership listings, commemorations and guides.
  - b. **Baltimore Legends & Legacies Heritage Pass** – an exclusive pass providing discounted admission to Baltimore's premier African American museums including The National Great Blacks in Wax Museum, Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture, and the Frederick Douglass-Isaac Myers Maritime Park.
  - c. **Multicultural tourism guides** – In addition to the Official Visit Baltimore Guide and a dedicated LGBT Visitor Guide, our new (and award winning) **Dream Baltimore Heritage Guide** is available free online, at the Baltimore Visitor Center, at other locations around the city and by request via mail.
  - d. **Family Reunion Expo** – This partnership with greiBO Entertainment features live performances, seminars, food tastings and family activities as well as a variety of vendors from the City's multicultural and small business tourism community.
  - e. **City and State Commemorations** – Most recently, Visit Baltimore coordinated **Jubilee 1864** efforts on behalf of Baltimore including a special Legends and Legacies Heritage Bus tour and activities. And as part of **Black History Month**, we organized two special **Legends and Legacies Heritage Bus** tours that were sold out, attended by individuals aged 12 – 60+ and from Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania.
4. We **proactively engage Baltimore's African American, multicultural *and* small business community** in our promotional efforts, and, in welcoming visitors when they are here:
  - a. We have a **membership structure** to help Baltimore's tourism and hospitality community tap into the City's/State's meetings and tourism market. Membership in Visit Baltimore is open to

everyone, and we encourage a diverse membership network in order to help more people discover all that our city has to offer.



- At least **15%** of our members are WMBE-owned businesses; of which, **17%** are African American-owned businesses.
- Furthermore, **580 or 80%** of our total **members** are located in and across Baltimore City.
- Visit Baltimore has designed specific initiatives such as its Strategic Neighborhood Retail Initiative to make membership more affordable for **small business**. For example, more than 100 individual businesses are now members via 7 Neighborhood partnerships.
- Furthermore, Visit Baltimore has always offered a membership fee structure based on a business' respective size (e.g. # of employees, # of seats in a restaurant, annual attendance, etc.).

- b. A **Multicultural Advisory Committee** comprised of volunteer representatives from the local business community helps us to: 1) identify and attract diversity meetings and then lend their support to groups that select Baltimore as a host destination; and, 2) expand our local membership base and identify diverse partnership opportunities. Visit Baltimore also has an **LGBT Advisory Committee** with an additional marketing, membership and sales remit; and, a **Customer Advisory Board (CAB)** comprised of meeting planners including those from multicultural organization and who provide input on sales initiatives, feedback on how the city is performing and insight into industry trends.

5. Visit Baltimore and the City have experienced **great success in the multicultural meetings and leisure tourism market:**

- a. Since July 2010, Visit Baltimore has hosted **more than 35 multicultural meetings** attended by 90,000+ (meetings driving \$32M in economic impact).
- b. Looking ahead, we have more multicultural meetings on the calendar including key bookings such as the **2017 NAACP Annual Convention (7/18-26/2017)**.
- c. According to visitor data and profiles provided by Longwoods International:
  - **23%** of Baltimore's overnight leisure visitors and **18%** of Baltimore's day leisure visitors are African American (*vs. 10% and 8% respectively on average nationally*)
  - Baltimore's visitors are experiencing our **Historic Places (~35%)** and/or **Cultural Activities/Attractions (31%)** – rates far surpassing the national averages.

Consider that Baltimore had nearly 24 million visitors in 2013 – these numbers are significant.