

FROM	NAME & TITLE	CHRIS RYER, DIRECTOR 	CITY of BALTIMORE  <b>MEMO</b>	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 8 <sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET		
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #21-0118 / AREA OF SPECIAL SIGN CONTROL – DESIGNATION – NORTH HARBOR		

TO

The Honorable President and  
Members of the City Council  
City Hall, Room 400  
100 North Holliday Street

DATE: October 8, 2021

At its regular meeting of October 7, 2021, the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #21-0118, for the purpose of approving the application of Downtown Partnership of Baltimore to designate an Area of Special Sign Control known as the North Harbor District; and providing for a special effective date.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached staff report which recommended amendment and approval of City Council Bill #21-0118 and adopted the following resolution nine members being present (nine in favor):

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission adopts the findings of fact below and recommends that the bill be amended and approved with the following amendment.

Findings of Fact:

- The designation will not increase the likelihood of traffic congestion or distraction: Downtown Baltimore has a lot of existing traffic and the presence of large billboards will not increase the amount of traffic congestion.
- The designation will not add to the visual clutter in the area: Though there is some concern regarding architectural issues, especially on historic properties, those can be addressed through the architectural standards for the billboards coming. Because of the dense nature of the zone, those issues do not present a reason to not allow the ASSC, but could look at it again later with the specific plans in mind to address any future visual clutter concerns.
- The designation will not be incongruous with the existing or contemplated design of the downtown area: In the case of the downtown district, having digital billboards and special signing, is quite congruous with the neighborhood and with a downtown business district that the Baltimore wants to have. In addition, there is some level of cost benefit analysis and that there's a significant need for downtown to grow and to be strategic about trying to build businesses.

Amendment: Delete the current metes and bounds and replace with the following:

“Beginning at the point of the intersection of the of the center lines of Howard Street and Conway, then north on Howard Street to the intersection with West Camden Street, then west along the center line of West Camden Street to the point of South Paca

intersection, then north along the center line of South Paca to the point of West Pratt Street intersection, then east on West Pratt Street to the intersection with North Howard Street, then north along the center line of North Howard Street to the point of East Baltimore Street Intersection, then east along the center line of East Baltimore Street to the point of Commerce Street Intersection, then south along the center line of Commerce Street to the point of Water Street Intersection, then east along the center line of Water Street to the point of S Frederick Street intersection, then north along the center line of S Frederick Street to the E Baltimore Street intersection, then east along the center line of E Baltimore Street to the intersection with the southbound side of President Street, then south along said southbound center line of President Street to the point of the Pratt Street intersection, then continue south on President Street for 171 feet, then southwest for 25 feet to the southeast corner of 729 East Pratt Street, extending southwest on southern property line to the southwest corner of said property, continue on same line for 114 feet to meet the eastern property line of 727 East Pratt Street, following said property line southerly for 30 feet, then westerly on a line parallel to East Pratt Street for 1,128 feet to the southeast corner of the property known as Block 0890 Lot 005, following said property line westerly to the southeast corner of 401 East Pratt Street, then westerly along a straight line to the southwest corner of said property, then westerly along the southern property line and extended for a total of 596 feet, then north for 260 feet to meet the centerline of East Pratt Street, then east along East Pratt Street to the intersection with Light Street, then south along the center line of Light Street to the point of Conway intersection, then west along the center line to the intersection at Howard Street.”

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Eric Tiso, Division Chief, Land Use and Urban Design Division at 410-396-8358.

CR/ewt

attachment

cc: Ms. Natasha Mehu, Mayor's Office  
Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office  
The Honorable Eric Costello, Council Rep. to Planning Commission  
Mr. Matthew Stegman, City Council President's Office  
Ms. Nikki Thompson, City Council President's Office  
Mr. Colin Tarbert, BDC  
Ms. Kathleen Byrne, BMZA  
Mr. Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administration  
Ms. Stephanie Murdock, DHCD  
Ms. Elena DiPietro, Law Dept.  
Mr. Francis Burnszynski, PABC  
Mr. Liam Davis, DOT  
Ms. Natawna Austin, Council Services  
Ms. Shelonda Stokes, Downtown Partnership of Baltimore



Brandon M. Scott  
Mayor

## PLANNING COMMISSION

Sean D. Davis, Chairman

### STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer  
Director

October 7, 2021

**REQUEST:** City Council Bill #21-0118/ Area of Special Sign Control – Designation – North Harbor

For the purpose of approving the application of Downtown Partnership of Baltimore to designate an Area of Special Sign Control known as the North Harbor District; and providing for a special effective date.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Amend and Approve, with the following amendment:

- Delete the current metes and bounds and replace with the language provided on pages 3 and 4 of this report.

**STAFF:** Caitlin Audette

**PETITIONER:** Downtown Partnership of Baltimore

**OWNER:** Multiple Properties

#### **SITE/GENERAL AREA**

Site Conditions: The area of special sign control would incorporate a portion of Downtown Baltimore known as North Harbor. The area is identified as follows in the City Council Bill: beginning at the point of the intersection of the of the center lines of Howard Street and Conway; then, west along the center line of West Camden Street to the point of South Paca intersection; then north along the center line of South Paca to the point of Pratt Street intersection, then north along the center line of North Howard Street to the point of East Baltimore Street Intersection, then east along the center line of East Baltimore Street to the point of Commerce Street Intersection, then south along the center line of Commerce Street to the point of Water Street Intersection, then east along the center line of Water Street to the point of S Frederick Street intersection, then north along the center line of S Frederick Street to the E Baltimore Street intersection, then east along the center line of E Baltimore Street to the point of the President Street intersection, then south along the center line of President Street to the point of the Pratt Street intersection, then west along the Pratt Street including all parcels on Pratt Street to the point of the Light street intersection, then south along the center line of Light Street to the point of Conway intersection, then west along the center line to the intersection at Howard Street.

#### **HISTORY**

There are no previous legislative or Planning Commission actions regarding an Area of Special Sign Control in this area.

## CONFORMITY TO PLANS

Portions of the proposed area are within the Central Business District Urban Renewal Plan and the Inner Harbor Project 1 Urban Renewal Plan. The Urban Renewal Plans are both set to expire in 2041.

The Central Business District URP has limitations on signage and a prohibition on general advertising. Additionally, the URP includes notable properties and special districts of historic properties. These limitations would continue to impact affected properties as the stronger regulation applies. The URP will need to be amended, revoked, or each individual sign would need to receive a waiver. Planning staff is working to amend the URP to remove conflicts with the proposed ASSC.

The Inner Harbor Project 1 URP does not have conflicts with the proposed designation.

## ANALYSIS

Background: The Zoning Code allows for the creation of Areas of Special Sign Control under Title 17, Subtitle 5. The purpose of which is to allow commercial areas the ability to depart from the standard signage requirements described in the Zoning Code to better respond to their unique character. The Planning Commission may recommend, and the City Council may approve the designation of an area that meets specific criteria as an Area of Special Sign Control.

Following the designation of the Area of Special Sign Control, the Planning Commission must approve the Signage Plan before any signs may be erected in the ASSC. The Signage Plan is the document that provided the buildings allowed specific signage, as well as the signage type, size, and amount. The Signage Plan must conform with *Table 17-201: Sign Regulations* and *Table 17-306: Maximum Cumulative Area of Signs*.

The designation of an area as an Area of Special Sign Control is one of a limited number of ways to allow for new billboards within the city. It is the purpose of this designation that all of the proposed signs will be billboards.

The current boundaries are not completely clear, specifically around the waterfront and which properties along Pratt Street are included. Planning staff has provided updated metes and bounds that do not substantially change the boundaries, but rather clarify the boundaries.

### Standards of application review -

- The proposed boundaries include the following zoning districts – C-5-IH, C-5-DC, C-5-TO – all of which are allowable areas for an Area of Special Sign Control.
- The proposed boundaries meet the requirements for Size of Area, as they exceed 600 linear feet of street frontage, include multiple properties, include adjacent properties and those located directly across the street from one another, and are in the previously mentioned zoning districts.
- The Planning Commission may recommend approval of the application so long as the findings of fact are met, these same findings of fact are required during the Planning Commission review of the Signage Plan.

- Would not increase the likelihood of traffic congestion or distraction;
  - Planning staff is currently working with the applicant to refine the signage plan, staff will continue to work with DOT to verify that traffic congestion and distraction will not increase as a result of the proposed designation.
- Would not add to the visual clutter in the area; and
  - Planning staff is currently working with the applicant to refine the signage plan, as this process continues staff will verify that all proposed signs are situated in locations and are the right type and size to not add to the visual clutter in the area.
- Would not be incongruous with the existing or contemplated design of the area
  - Planning staff is currently working with the applicant to refine the signage plan, as this process continues staff will verify that all proposed signs are located in areas best suited for the proposed sign types including large digital billboards and are compatible with the design for the immediate area.

Equity:

- Impact:
  - How might the proposal impact the surrounding community in the short or long term?
    - Will provide additional revenue for impacted property owners. Effects on traffic are currently being reviewed by DOT.
  - How would this proposal impact existing patterns of inequity that persist in Baltimore?
    - No noticeable impact to existing patterns of inequity.
- Engagement:
  - Has the community been meaningfully engaged in discussing this proposal?
    - Yes, the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore has met with a variety of stakeholders to create meaningful engagement. This includes residents’ associations, businesses, and property owners.
  - How are residents who have been historically excluded from planning processes being authentically included in the planning of the proposed policy or project?
    - Downtown residents and property owners have not been excluded from planning processes historically.
- Internal Operations:
  - As this is the first ASSC proposal under review, it creates a large workload for planning staff, however, that would have happened regardless of location.

Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of the designation of the Area of Special Sign Control for the North Harbor area of Downtown with the amendment for clarification of the metes and bounds of the boundaries, as follows -

Amendment: Delete the current metes and bounds and replace with the following;

“Beginning at the point of the intersection of the of the center lines of Howard Street and Conway, then north on Howard Street to the intersection with West Camden Street, then west

along the center line of West Camden Street to the point of South Paca intersection, then north along the center line of South Paca to the point of West Pratt Street intersection, then east on West Pratt Street to the intersection with North Howard Street, then north along the center line of North Howard Street to the point of East Baltimore Street Intersection, then east along the center line of East Baltimore Street to the point of Commerce Street Intersection, then south along the center line of Commerce Street to the point of Water Street Intersection, then east along the center line of Water Street to the point of S Frederick Street intersection, then north along the center line of S Frederick Street to the E Baltimore Street intersection, then east along the center line of E Baltimore Street to the intersection with the southbound side of President Street, then south along said southbound center line of President Street to the point of the Pratt Street intersection, then continue south on President Street for 171 feet, then southwest for 25 feet to the southeast corner of 729 East Pratt Street, extending southwest on southern property line to the southwest corner of said property, continue on same line for 114 feet to meet the eastern property line of 727 East Pratt Street, following said property line southerly for 30 feet, then westerly on a line parallel to East Pratt Street for 1,128 feet to the southeast corner of the property known as Block 0890 Lot 005, following said property line westerly to the southeast corner of 401 East Pratt Street, then westerly along a straight line to the southwest corner of said property, then westerly along the southern property line and extended for a total of 596 feet, then north for 260 feet to meet the centerline of East Pratt Street, then east along East Pratt Street to the intersection with Light Street, then south along the center line of Light Street to the point of Conway intersection, then west along the center line to the intersection at Howard Street.”

Notification: Email notifications were provided to Downtown Partnership, Waterfront Partnership, Downtown Residents Advocacy Network, City Center Residents Association, Baltimore Development Corporation. Each affected property owner was mailed a notice of this hearing. Additionally, the applicant had posted five notices throughout the proposed area and included the posting in the loop on their 15 kiosks around downtown.

  
**Chris Ryer**  
**Director**