

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

LO25-0025

Underground Infrastructure Safety

Public Testimony

From: Christina Cortese

Sent: Tuesday, July 22, 2025 11:06 AM

To: Conway, Mark (City Council); Testimony

Subject: Testimony Re: Public Safety Committee LO25-0025

Good morning Councilmember Conway,

I am reaching out to submit written testimony regarding today's Public Safety Hearing regarding Underground Infrastructure Safety.

I am a resident of the 300 Block of N. Charles Street and have lived there since October 2019. I was around for the explosion at BGE Headquarters (it was so loud it rocked my apartment). I witnessed the window washers dangling from the building and watched the rescue with bated breath. I will have to say I disagree with both BGE and the city's accounts regarding the amount of underground fires. I have witnessed at least 3-4 underground fires occur in that area since I lived there in 2019. There was a time when my underground garage was filled with smoke and the power had been cut to take care of the fire.

The residents and business owners of 300 N. Charles Street are no stranger to emergency vehicles racing to the area and contractors digging up our street literally every single day. I have pictures from this morning of contractors in the street where I live, creating yet another road closure. They have not given the residents any updates nor followed through on any promises that city leaders, the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, or BGE/Xfinity/Verizon have made to ensure the area is safe and that work is done in a timely manner. I have grown accustomed to the sound of heavy machinery all day and all night since the underground fire in 2024 and have dealt with constant road closures and my power and internet constantly cutting out due to the work being performed in the street. The once pristine and beautiful roads and brick sidewalk have been completely destroyed and the streets are lumpy and horrific to drive on. I have had to deal with loss of AC and heat in my apartment in a city where heat is a tenant right due to the fire and contractors cutting off power. I am on medication that makes me sensitive to heat and puts me in danger of heatstroke.

In the aftermath of the 2024 fire, many residents around me were displaced and a beloved bookstore was destroyed. Several businesses had to close for a worrying amount of time and we had to deal with 24/7 road closures for months without being given any updates on safety or any information. I reached out to the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore on November 22, 2024 and never got a response back. I had no idea who to reach out to then or I would have done more outreach with city council. I was without internet for an entire week and had to travel various places just to get some wifi. Xfinity falsely claimed that they had provided hotspots downtown, but despite other tenants and myself trying to access said hotspots, they did not provide any

internet. I was without power for around 2-days and had to stay with a friend due to the September heat.

We received only one update from the City of Baltimore and Downtown Partnership of Baltimore on October 22, 2024 and it promised to restore the area to normal function as swiftly and safely as possible. They said they would continue to keep us updated as they made further progress but have not once followed-up on their promises. I am extremely concerned about the safety of the neighborhood and have not seen any progress on the repairs--in fact I have only seen further excavation and road closures with shoddy repairs to the roads and sidewalks being done. I am considering moving out of my beloved neighborhood due to everything going on. The photograph below is from this morning, July 22. I have attached the original update email from the City of Baltimore/DPOB and included is my inquiry in November 2024 that was never responded to. It is now July 2025 and things in the street appear to be worse than ever. I cannot imagine being a person with mobility issues living on my street.

Sincerely,

Christina Cortese



Christina Cortese

UPDATE on Charles Street Incident

2 messages

Downtown Partnership of Baltimore <info@dpob.org>
Reply-To: Downtown Partnership of Baltimore <info@dpob.org>

Tue, Oct 22, 2024 at 3:20 PM

Dear Community Members,

In partnership, the City of Baltimore, Downtown Partnership, and Charles Street Development, is reaching out to provide several important updates regarding the ongoing recovery efforts on Charles Street. Over the past few weeks, multiple city agencies, community partners, and utility providers have coordinated to restore the area to normal function as swiftly and safely as possible. We appreciate your continued patience, understanding, and flexibility as we address the priorities affecting residents and businesses.

While there is still work ahead, we are pleased to share the following updates:

Businesses Temporarily Relocated

Stem & Vine and Viva Books are now OPEN for business at [800 N. Charles St.](#) with all required permits and licenses in place.

Resident Support

All displaced residents from Brown's Arcade have been paired with case workers from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success (MOCFS) to receive temporary housing support. Additionally, in response to questions raised at the recent community meeting about general housing support, we've added a new section on the [resource page](#), called "General Support for Tenants" which consolidates services available to all city residents in one convenient document.

Brown's Arcade Building

We are happy to report significant progress at Brown's Arcade, including the restoration of power to the building. There are still a few critical steps needed before the building can officially reopen, but rest assured that all relevant agencies and partners are working diligently to complete this process safely.

Support for Other Local Businesses

We recognize that ongoing traffic disruptions and repair work have impacted many businesses in the area. The Charles Street Development Corporation has played a key role in coordinating support and conducting regular check-ins with affected businesses. To further assist, we are preparing marketing and communication initiatives to be launched in the coming weeks, encouraging everyone to visit and support Charles Street businesses, with the message that "Charles Street is open for business."

Service Provider Coordination

Baltimore City convened a meeting of utility providers on Friday to continue to coordinate response, recovery, and prevention efforts for the area. In light of the recent underground fire, BGE is implementing enhanced safety measures, including proactive manhole inspections. These inspections aim to ensure the long-term safety of the city's underground utility infrastructure. BGE will return within the next 30 days to perform additional duct inspection work as well, which will require lane closures. Additionally, crews have been working in close coordination with city agencies and community organizations to accelerate repairs and minimize further disruptions. These proactive and productive meetings will continue.

We remain committed to supporting everyone affected by this disruption and will continue to keep you updated as we make further progress. Thank you again for your patience and support as we work through this together.

Christina Cortese <christina.yj.cortese@gmail.com>
To: Downtown Partnership of Baltimore <info@dpob.org>

Fri, Nov 22, 2024 at 10:21 PM

Good Evening,

I am reaching out as an affected resident living on North Charles Street (301 N. Charles St). I luckily am not one of those displaced by the underground fire, however, my building has still been impacted by the incident. We lost power for over a day, and were without internet for nearly a week. The construction is ongoing, random, and disruptive to our lives. The work is noisy and road blockages seem to pop up at random. I understand that the construction must continue and I am happy to deal with the noise and random road closures so long as the issues underground are resolved. What is unacceptable to me is that it is causing a constant interruption of internet service and the most recent incident that occurred below.

We were informed today, 11/22/24, by our leasing agent (PMC Property Group) that BGE is at fault for the complete ongoing outage in our HVAC system. It snowed today, and the temperature is currently 42 degrees. It is only going to get colder. None of us in 301 N. Charles Street have heat. I am currently experiencing chilblains/cold urticaria in my hands and feet due to the low temperature. We have no update on when our systems will be restored.

I witnessed the gas explosion at BGE headquarters, have been here for the three underground fires in the area, and I am greatly concerned regarding the quality and oversight of the work being performed around our building. The HVAC outages and internet interruptions are my greatest concerns. I am wondering how we can move forward with the work while ensuring the least amount of disruption possible.

Thanks,
Christina C.

[Quoted text hidden]