

**POLITICS**

# The city's primary choice

*Tuesday's Democratic victor should set the tone for development in Baltimore for the rest of the decade*

**BY ANDY ROSEN**

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Community leaders will look to whomever is elected mayor of Baltimore this fall to harness the city's economic growth potential by converting problems into assets.

Voters will go to the polls Tuesday for the Democratic primary election, a vote that historically decides many Baltimore races. The winner, who will face Republican Elbert R. Henderson in the November general election, will likely set the tone for development, both on the large scale and in the city's neighborhoods, for the rest of the decade.

Crime fighting strategy, property tax policy and education are also seen as key tools in the city's economic development strategy, and candidates have focused in on those issues. Many community and business advocates say Baltimore's economy would benefit

from taking advantage of the city's underutilized work force and its large stock of unused or dilapidated housing.

This election will see citizens choose their first mayor since Martin O'Malley resigned in January after being elected governor and

then-City Council President Sheila Dixon took over at Baltimore City Hall.

Donald C. Fry, president of the **Greater Baltimore Committee**, noted that Baltimore's mayor will have to work to continue the city's recent progress and make sure it continues to be an attractive place for people to live and

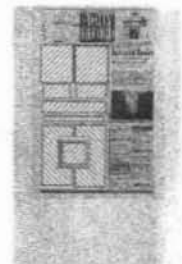
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*Jill Carter*

work.

"Probably the most critical thing for the next mayor to do is to make sure that we continue the progress that we've made over the past six to eight years," Fry said. "There are still a lot of people who are very interested in investing in our city, and we want to make sure we come up with ways to contin-

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ue to attract them."

Education and Baltimore's persistent violent crime rate have loomed large in the mayoral race so far, but many candidates also link those to economic development issues. Mayor Dixon, City Councilman Keiffer J. Mitchell Jr., State Del. Jill P. Carter, schools administrator Andrey Bundley, Philip Brown, activist A. Robert Kaufman and businessman Mike Schaefer are seeking the office.

In the most recent poll conducted by The (Baltimore) Sun, Dixon had 46 percent, Mitchell 19 percent, Bundley 4 percent and Carter 2 percent. Brown, Kaufman and Schaefer were at 1 percent or less. Undecided voters made up 28 percent of the total.

In an interview, Dixon said a top priority for the next mayoral term is going to be continued growth of the city's employment base.

"The creation of jobs with quality salaries is going to be a big piece," she said. "Also, helping small business make that next step is going to be critical."

She noted that she expects to work closely with the state government to minimize the local damage from any budget cuts that could come as the state addresses a looming \$1.46 billion budget deficit.

Dixon also points to her work on the city's property tax rate, which at \$2.268 per \$100 of assessed value is more than double that of any other jurisdiction in the state, and the need to address the city's large number of vacant properties. Her administration has set a preliminary target of lowering tax-

es by 25 percent.

Mitchell, whose economic development plan includes emphasis on small business, work force development and decreased taxes, said he would encourage cooperation between the city and private enterprises to bring employment to Baltimore.

"The main core is attracting businesses small and large to our city," Mitchell said. "That's why I do a lot of [work] on creating partnerships between the city and the business community."

Carter said education and work force development remain her top priority. She said preparing people for jobs will help control crime and spur development.

"Clearly, when you build up the educational system and decrease the criminal activity on the streets ... that's going to be the starting point," Carter said.

Bundley, who did not return phone calls last

week seeking comment, wrote on his campaign Web site that his top business priority will also be to work with employers to bring jobs to the area. He has said he will focus resources on neighborhood-based development.

"We will insist that doing business in Baltimore City requires the training and hiring of its residents," the Web site reads. Bundley wrote that he would encour-

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*Andrey Bundley*



age business to contribute to a fund that would support social and economic development in the city.

Candidates generally agreed that a comprehensive economic development plan for the city is going to take into account solutions to Baltimore's housing and crime problems. In both cases, the city has an opportunity to turn a liability into an asset, observers said. The city often loses tax money on vacant property, and has to spend public safety money to prevent fires.

Hathaway Ferebee, executive director of the **Safe and Sound Campaign**, a group that advocates for resources for children and families in Baltimore, said helping prepare people for work also reduces the burden they could put on society by resorting to crime or being put in prison.

"All of that's going into the plus side of our economy, and they're not draining on the minus side," she said.

Carter said it makes sense to start small in neighborhood economic development.

"If we had more thriving small and medium-sized business throughout the city, number one, we would have increased employment ... and the second thing is have less crime."

Mitchell also noted that economic development has generally been driven by small business, but pointed out that the city can also benefit from larger employers, especially in the biotechnology and scientific sectors.

Transportation will likely also be an

issue for economic growth, the **GBC's Fry** noted.

"We need to make sure that we have good streets," he said. "We need to make sure that we have transit that can bring people to and from their places of employment."

Christian S. Johansson, president and CEO of the **Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore**, said Baltimore will face unique opportunities over the next several years. As the city is coming into its own, it has a chance to attract workers who will be coming to the region as part of the military base realignment and closure plan.

He said BRAC has potential to draw "very talented, dynamic people."

"That's a big opportunity for the city," Johansson said, "probably the biggest opportunity for us as a community since the economic expansion after World War II."

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*Don Fry*

