

The Greater Baltimore Committee

A Brief History

(Compiled from GBC historical documents)

GBC's Concept – An Action Committee

For more than five decades the Greater Baltimore Committee, the region's premier organization of business and civic leaders, has focused the resources of its broad membership on the key issues relating to business climate and quality of life in the Greater Baltimore.

The GBC was organized on January 5, 1955 as an action committee designed to mobilize the commercial, industrial and professional leadership of Baltimore to bring about tangible and rapid improvements in the community.

In the 1950s, Baltimore's waterfront reflected the state of its downtown area. Once teeming with commerce, the city's waterfront was decimated, characterized by vacant warehouses and the city's formerly thriving downtown retail district was losing customers to the suburbs.

Impressed by the success of Pittsburgh, Pa. in turning its abandoned riverfront industrial district through a private-public partnership called the Allegheny Conference, a group of Baltimore's leading businessmen organized the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC).

The GBC's first urban renewal committee chairman was James W. Rouse. In the GBC's first annual report, Rouse put forward an elementary concept for convincing private investors and government to work together on downtown revitalization. "To revive the city, its most precious resource – land – must be put back to work with bold planning, better organization, and a much faster pace."

GBC raised money from members and created a planning council to assist the city government in developing a first project and a long-term plan for revitalizing downtown Baltimore.

1959 - Charles Center, GBC's First Transforming Project

The GBC leaders decided to focus on making a major thrust against downtown's most immediate challenge – the deteriorating retail district. It developed plans for a 33-acre mid-town site that lay directly between the city's retail and financial districts. In 1959, the City Council adopted the project – Charles Center – as an official urban renewal plan.

1964 – Baltimore's Waterfront, GBC Nurtures a Grand Rebirth

Once the Charles Center project was well underway, Baltimore Mayor Theodore McKeldin called for the redevelopment of 240 acres toward the waterfront. In 1964, David Wallace, a renowned architect who had worked with the GBC's planning committee on the Charles Center project, produced a plan for a 30-year, \$260 million effort to redevelop the harbor's edge.

The Greater Baltimore Committee successfully campaigned for voter approval of bonds to pay for the first steps in redeveloping the Inner Harbor. The GBC played a leading role in the creation and support of Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management, Inc., which managed the development of the projects that came to be known as "Baltimore's Renaissance."

1965 – Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management, Inc. is Born

Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management, Inc. was created to manage the planning and development of Baltimore’s two keynote projects. Baltimore’s acclaimed “downtown renaissance” was underway. The more than three decades of dramatic revitalization along Baltimore’s waterfront that followed have been characterized by a remarkable mix of private and government investment, unique vision, determined leadership, and seized opportunities.

Charles Center Inner Harbor Management, Inc. was, in effect, a private nonprofit corporation with a single client – the City of Baltimore. The corporation had a contract with the Mayor and the City Council providing for the corporation to manage the planning and execution of the Charles Center and Inner Harbor projects, under the direction of the city’s Urban Renewal and Housing agency. It performed all of the activities that a city renewal agency would normally perform in project development.

All government employees, private-sector developers and contractors, and citizens clearly knew that issues pertaining to significant urban renewal projects were to be directed to Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management, Inc.

Three individuals played key roles in the history of this corporation: J. Jefferson Miller, the original general manager of the Charles Center project and first chairman of Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management, Inc.; Martin Millspaugh, president; and Walter Sondheim Jr., the corporation’s chairman from 1972 to 1989.

Walter Sondheim continued to serve as the Greater Baltimore Committee’s senior advisor and was deeply involved as a mentor to business leaders and advisor to the elected leaders of Baltimore City and the State of Maryland until his death on February 15, 2007 at the age of 98. Martin Millspaugh today is an urban development consultant and remains a member of the GBC.

Baltimore’s Inner Harbor Renewal – Key Dates

1972

The Constellation becomes the Inner Harbor’s first attraction

1973

Annual City Fair moves to the Inner Harbor

1976

Bicentennial Celebration, Tall Ships Visit Baltimore.

Maryland Science Center opens

Rash Athletic Field opens

World Trade Center completed

Harborplace wins voter approval

1979

Baltimore Convention Center opens

1980

Harborplace opens

1981

National Aquarium opens

Hyatt Regency Hotel opens

1988

The Gallery at Harborplace opens

1990

Marine Mammal Pavilion added to National Aquarium

1992

Camden Yards opens

1998

Ravens Football Stadium opens

2000

Marriott Waterfront Hotel opens

GBC's Broad Range of Initiatives, Regional Impact

In addition to taking the lead in the development of Charles Center and the Inner Harbor, the GBC has initiated or played lead roles in dozens of other major projects that have greatly impacted Baltimore City and the region, including:

1955 – 1960s

- Construction of Jones Falls Expressway
- Development of Friendship Airport (now BWI)
- Construction of Baltimore Civic Center
- Creation of the Maryland Port Authority
- Creation of the Mass Transit Administration

1970s - 1980s

- Created the Development Credit Fund for minority business
- Business partnerships for Baltimore City schools
- Baltimore Convention Center
- Development of Westside Skills Center
- Created The Leadership program
- Created the CollegeBound Foundation
- Key player in long-term Orioles lease and new stadium plans

1990s - 2008

- Location of Ravens NFL franchise in Baltimore
- “Smart on Crime” strategy
- Life sciences strategy for regional growth
- Baltimore Convention Center expansion
- Launched Greater Baltimore Tech Council
- Launched Greater Baltimore Alliance
- Launched Hippodrome Theater project
- Homicide reduction initiative
- City-State reform of Baltimore City Public Schools
- Management reform of city government and Baltimore City Public Schools
- Strengthening Inner Harbor Planning and Management
- West Side revitalization
- East-Side life sciences park and revitalization; regional bioscience initiative
- Strengthening regional transportation planning and funding
- Bridging the Gap minority business development initiative

Partner Organizations Nurtured and Launched by the GBC:

- The Development Credit Fund -1983
- The Leadership - 1983
- CollegeBound Foundation - 1988
- Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore (formerly Greater Baltimore Alliance) - 1997
- Greater Baltimore Tech Council - 1999