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## City seeks to turn around 'disinvestment' in Charles Village area

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Daniel J. Sernovitz](#) Staff

Baltimore's economic development arm is seeking consultants to help the city stimulate development south of the Charles village area, a part of town officials say has not seen any new construction for nearly three decades.

The **Baltimore Development Corp.**, which is overseeing the process, said Friday the consultants will help the city put together a plan to stimulate economic revitalization and business development opportunities, identify public open space projects, promote arts and entertainment, and encourage the redevelopment of a dozen specific properties in the area.

Penn Station, the **Schuler School of Arts**, the **University of Baltimore** and the **Maryland Institute College of Art** are all located in the area to be studied.

Also included is the controversial Magnet Bar. The BDC previously condemned the former drinking establishment using quick-take authority, an expedited form of condemnation. The bar's former owner, George Valsamaki, sued the city over its rationale for condemning the land.

The state Court of Appeals sided with Valsamaki in a ruling which sharply criticized the BDC in failing to show an urgent need to condemn the property.

The area would also take on increased visibility if the **Charles Street Development Corp.** is successful in its efforts to create a trolley service which would travel along Charles Street through the neighborhood.

The Charles Village development corporation **launched a study of the project in late June to determine if the trolley service will work financially and logistically.** That study is expected to take two years.

The BDC said many of the buildings in the Charles/North Urban Renewal Area have "suffered disinvestment for over three decades." While some buildings have been renovated, the BDC said there has been no new construction in the area since a shopping center and a high-rise building for the elderly were built there the 1980s.

Paul J. Dombrowski, director of planning and design for the BDC who is overseeing the project, said the city has been in talks with community groups in the area and with the owners of property within the 10-block area. He said several of those owners have expressed an interest in the effort.

Dombrowski said he thinks a lack of investment in the area has prompted would-be developers to wait for others to improve their properties first, and the BDC is hoping the plan will encourage all of those owners to see the area is worth improving and that "nobody feels like the pioneer that's out there in the desert all by himself."

"The public is well aware of it and some of the property owners themselves are very supportive of it and very engaged by it," Dombrowski said.

The BDC has given consultants until August 20 to submit qualification letters. Following a screening process, including a round of interviews, the city is scheduled to select a consulting firm on Sept. 4.

Detailed information about the project, including a list of the proposed redevelopment sites, can be found by selecting the Charles North Physical Development Plan RFQ link at [www.baltimoredevelopment.com/rfp.asp](http://www.baltimoredevelopment.com/rfp.asp).

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