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## Some may find trolley ride taxing

### Streetcar backers pitch levy on properties close to route

10/31/07

By Adam Bednar

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The clang of a trolley bell could sound a lot more like the ring of a city cash register to some north Baltimore homeowners.

The Charles Street Development Corp., a group promoting the corridor, is proposing a real estate tax on some properties to fund the operating budget of a proposed \$150 million, fixed-rail trolley line that would run mostly along St. Paul and Charles streets between the Inner Harbor and University Parkway.



A streetcar rolls though downtown Portland, Ore. The Charles Street Development Corp. is using the Portland servers as a model for the trolley on Charles Street.

The corporation, which is spearheading efforts to make the trolley line a reality, has been sounding out Abell and several other communities about the idea of a real estate tax of 0.05 percent for private properties within a quarter mile of a proposed 7.5-mile track, and a 0.02 percent real estate percent tax on tax- exempt properties.

The tax would equal \$50 for every \$100,000 of assessed property value, and \$20 for every \$100,000 of assessed value

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of tax-exempt properties. The tax would have to be approved by the City Council.

The percentages could be adjusted if annual property assessments rise significantly, said David Funk, the corporation's trolley committee chairman.

Depending on the trolley's route, the property tax could affect home and business owners in parts of Abell, Charles Village, Oakenshawe and Guilford.

The plan was introduced to the finance and governance working group of the committee Oct. 22, Funk said.

He said the plan, developed by Hans Mayer, former executive director of the Maryland Economic Development Corp., is a preliminary proposal.

"The Charles Street Development Corp. is not going to propose any financing plan that would not be acceptable to the community," he said.

Community reaction was mixed, especially from those who already pay a surcharge to the Charles Village Benefits District.

"I have concerns about the plan, because, as I understand it, the trolley is being designed as a system that will benefit all residents (including) homeowners and renters, visitors and businesses needing ... transportation to points along and near the trolley's planned route," Dana Peterson Moore, president of the Charles Village Civic Association, said in an e-mail.

"Given this plan, I have difficulty understanding and accepting why one group of stakeholders should bear the cost of bringing the trolley on-line while other constituent groups are not similarly expected to absorb the cost. If we are to keep the public in this form of transportation, and we should, then the public should bear the cost, not individual property owners," Moore said.

Lynda Riley, president of the Guilford Association, said in an e-mail, "I doubt that the Guilford community would be in favor of a tax increase to fund this trolley because I doubt many of the residents would use it."

Becky Bridger, co-president of the Oakenshawe Improvement Association, said she would be in favor of a tax to improve public transit as long as the fee was "nominal."

Members of the working group are presenting the tax proposal to their communities and are scheduled to present the feedback to the committee in February.

Corporation officials said last summer that they hoped to break ground on the project in 2009, with operations beginning in 2012. They hope to defray construction costs by using city tax increment financing bonds.

Trolley backers have agreed they will not seek transportation funds from the federal or state governments.

A feasibility study of the proposed trolley line is under way,

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Funk said. The city Board of Estimates approved \$200,000 for the study in June.

Trolley service is the brainchild of Henry Hagan, chief operating officer of Monumental Life Insurance Co. in downtown Baltimore. He has said the trolley would help to revive Charles Street as Baltimore's "main street."

The plan is based on a similar trolley in Portland, Ore. Kittleson & Associates designed that project as well as the proposed Baltimore route. In June, the firm's transportation analyst, Yolanda Takesian, called the trolley the most effective rail option for the city and advocated it as a relatively cheap alternative to the city's light rail.

Current plans have the line heading from Conway Street to Cathedral Street, crossing Mount Royal Avenue, heading north on Charles Street, crossing University Parkway and looping around at Bishops Lane, then heading east on University and south on St. Paul, crossing at Mount Royal and heading south on Charles back to Conway.

Editor Larry Perl contributed to this article.

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