

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

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Abell Salutes: The Downtown Partnership; Bringing pride back into downtown Baltimore

Everyday the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore is working to ensure that the potential of the region's economic and cultural hub is realized, keeping Baltimore's downtown the center of the entire region.

Although the Partnership's Clean and Safe programs are its most visible, the Partnership has been an advocate for a number of issues critical to downtown. These issues include: increasing availability of parking, building downtown's residential base, activating open spaces, and improving the area's pedestrian and aesthetic appeal.

Examples include...

- The Partnership is coordinating an effort to transform downtown into the region's newest neighborhood. Presently there are 3,030 apartments either in the pre-leasing, construction or planning stages, in order to keep up with a reported demand for as many as 1,700 new units annually in downtown.
- The organization is improving downtown's total environment by making money available for façade improvements and working with the City's Department of Housing and Community Development to enforce building codes and aesthetic standards.

continued on page 6

A Turning of the Wheel:

Attracting new Americans into Baltimore City's neighborhoods — again. Immigration is the key to reversing Baltimore City's population decline

By Bruce A. Morrison, with Paul Donnelly

Introduction

And so they came, the waves of immigrants from Europe overwhelming Baltimore's Locust Point, creating their own neighborhoods as replicas of the villages they had left, and energizing Baltimore City life at every level. By the 1920s these same immigrants and their descendants had made Baltimore City the third largest port of entry in the United States, and helped make it the sixth largest city in America. Diversity was the midwife of progress.

The Irish laborers ensconced themselves in the famous "10th Ward," taking in Greenmount Avenue and the neighborhoods between Green Mount Cemetery and the Maryland Penitentiary. Later they were drawn to work in the Mt. Vernon cotton duck mills, settling along Falls Road and becoming the labor force for the Hooper Mills and creating the rowhouse neighborhoods of Hampden and Woodberry.

The Poles, attracted to the heavy "smokestack" industry jobs in East Baltimore, clustered around their churches—St. Stanislaus, Holy Rosary, St. Casimir, and St. Aloysius, on South Ann Street and Eastern Avenue.

The Germans settled in Old Town and Highlandtown (which is why Baltimore had so many breweries, slaughterhouses and soccer teams); The Italians arrived as early as 1850, stopping off at Baltimore on their way to the California gold fields and taking temporary work helping to build the B & O Railroad. Greeks moved into the tiny rowhouses out Eastern Avenue and brought the word "Greektown" into Baltimore speech. The Ukrainians moved to Canton and Fells Point; the Jews to the street-peddling life of East Baltimore.

But "America First" fever during WWI forced the end of the country's open-door immigration and froze the ethnic neighborhoods in place, at least through the end of World War II. Beginning in the 1960's, Hispanics (who have made Lower Broadway an ethnic enclave where Spanish is the first language), have established a presence in Baltimore, as have Indians and other Asians. Vietnamese families, who came first as refugees, are buying homes in Pigtown in Southwest Baltimore.

Notwithstanding this recent, modest increase in Baltimore City's immigration, over the decades, according to a report in *The Sun* (April 8, 2001), "A scarcity of

continued on page 2

high tech and skilled jobs, the City's struggling school system, crime, racial prejudice and the absence of a sizable immigrant community, have all conspired to deflect most new arrivals from Baltimore City towards the suburbs—especially to those outside Washington.”

Now in the 21st century, there has been a turning of the wheel: With the population of Baltimore falling from about a million to about 650,000, along with the loss of industry and a complex of seemingly intractable social problems, a memory of Baltimore's earlier immigrant experience and its contribution to Baltimore's glory days are enticing Baltimore City's leadership to observe carefully how other cities with similar problems have benefited from immigration, to freshen and invigorate their economies and lifestyles.

During the last decade of the 20th century in America the percentage of foreign-born (as opposed to native-born) surged nationally to levels not seen since the early 1900s, reaching almost 11 percent of the population. One third of the increase of the U.S. population in the last decade represents growth in the number of foreign-born residents. During this same period Baltimore City lost 11.5 percent of its population. It has a small immigrant population for a city its size, with just 5.5 percent foreign born, according to the last census figures—roughly half the national average. These trends, together with a decade's experience with refugee resettlement, should lead Baltimore City's community leaders to ask: can an effort to attract more immigrants to Baltimore City reverse the five decade decline in the City's population?

This study was conducted to explore

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the premise that immigration can do exactly that. The study delves into available census and INS data to investigate the experience of comparable American cities. The results of the study led to two dramatic conclusions.

1. For cities of Baltimore's size (between 250,000 and 1,000,000) outside the Sun Belt, without immigration population decline is the norm. Moreover, immigration explains all of the growth that does occur. The data strongly indicate that if Baltimore City is to stabilize its population, immigrants are essential.
2. The few comparable cities that have reversed their population declines through immigration did not plan their success. Thus, there are no strategic plans or prospective programs to affirmatively recruit immigrants that Baltimore City can draw upon. The City must pioneer.

Our analysis of the demographic data led us to define three groups of cities to compare to Baltimore:

1. The five largest U.S. cities—Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York and Philadelphia.
2. “Comparable cities” with declining population and low immigration—Buffalo, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Toledo and Washington, D.C.
3. “Model cities” that have stemmed population decline through immigration — Atlanta, Boston, Newark, Oakland, and Minneapolis and St. Paul.

All of the large cities, except Philadelphia, had substantial immigration in the past decade. For New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, this immigrant growth was greater than the overall growth in population for the city. Houston, reflecting the different demographic trends of the Sun Belt, would have had some growth without its immigrants.

In comparing Baltimore City with the “comparable cities,” a familiar pattern emerges. Low immigration and declining population are endemic to these cities in the Northeast-Midwest region. Philadelphia lost total population; however, had it not received some immigrants, its population decline would have been twice as large.

The “model cities” of similar size to Baltimore City were selected for their success in attracting immigrants. Except for Atlanta, without their recent immigrants these cities would be losing significant population. Atlanta exhibits the Sun Belt difference seen in Houston—some growth above immigration. Although they differ in many ways, all of the other

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

“model cities” would have declining populations similar to Baltimore City and its “comparable cities” in the absence of significant immigration.

A Closer Look at the “Model Cities”

We searched the literature and made inquiries in the cities where immigration is substantial. None has a history of planning to attract immigrants. Immigrants tend to settle where there are already similar groups of the foreign-born. Retaining existing immigrant communities is part of the strategy for attracting more newcomers from similar backgrounds. Municipal efforts have been directed at serving existing substantial immigrant populations, ranging from the most extensive program in New York City, to more limited efforts in Boston and Minneapolis. These programs improve the ability of immigrants to access city services and participate in civic life by offering or connecting people to housing, employment training and counseling, immigrant legal services and citizen application information.

But, these local programs are the cart, not the horse. They assist in assimilating immigrants and keeping them coming, but they do not create the initial flows. In the absence of examples of planned activities to attract immigrants, we relied on the contrasts between key factors in these “model cities” and Baltimore City’s situation to develop recommendations for specific interventions and activities.

Recent Immigration to Baltimore

Over 60 percent of Baltimore City’s immigrants have arrived within the last ten years—a positive sign indicating that immigration to the City is increasing. However, the rate of growth is inadequate to match the population loss. The net increase in foreign-born residents is about

20,000 for the decade, but the overall population declined by almost 85,000. Stability means attracting over 8,000 net new residents each year, in addition to the prior-decade influx of 2,000 per year.

Keys to Growth

We have identified three ways in which Baltimore can actively work to promote the migration of the foreign-born to the City.

1. Enhance characteristics that have proved to be “magnets” for immigrants elsewhere.
2. Retain and support existing immigrant communities.
3. Identify available populations to attract to Baltimore City both through initial and secondary migration.

Immigration is a Network Phenomenon.

Immigrants attract others from their home countries through a networking process. Critical to this process is the existence of concentrated populations of core communities from particular “source countries.” In many ways, it is arbitrary to distinguish factors that act as magnets

from factors that also lead to retention.

An analysis of the distribution of source countries among immigrants settling for the first time in metropolitan Boston, Washington, Newark and Oakland reveals major source countries for each. The particular countries vary but the pattern is the same. Networks of existing immigrants attract others from the same source. Thus even a small country like El Salvador (D.C.) or Haiti (Newark and Boston) may predominate. The proportions of immigrants from different regional sources vary widely within single cities, but which regions predominate are also different among the different cities. Even between the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, there is a marked difference in immigrant groups present in the two cities.

Baltimore City differs from the “model cities” in that it lacks the concentrated core communities necessary to a continuing influx. Data from the 1990 census reveal no dominant source country for the City. Asians have become the largest immigrant group, with Koreans being the largest Asian population in the metropolitan area. The Mexican population has grown rapidly in the past decade, from a handful to almost 1 percent of the Baltimore City population. The number of Africans has more than doubled, and small Salvadoran and West Indian populations are present. The European-origin population is falling because it is composed of immigrants from an earlier time who are no longer attracting their countrymen.

Job Opportunities.

Immigrant networks depend on accessible job opportunities—more than the mere potential for jobs but specific jobs, with employers committing to immigrant labor to sustain their operations, or to support growth. Immigrant skill levels vary greatly, with both high-skilled and low-skilled cohorts. With the exception of

continued on page 4

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the few employers involved in refugee resettlement work, Baltimore City's major employers and employment sectors reveal little knowledge of, or focus on, existing immigrant communities as a source of workers.

Housing Costs

Among the "model cities," there is a striking difference between those cities that have a higher number of immigrants living in the suburbs versus cities in which immigrants have opted to live in the inner-city area. One possible explanation for the success of "model cities" over their suburbs is that there appears to be more affordable housing in the inner city. The contrast in housing costs between Washington D.C. and the much lower housing costs in Baltimore City provides an incentive for immigrants, perhaps even more potent than for natives, to live and work in Baltimore City in preference to the Washington area.

Transportation.

Transportation infrastructure also affects the distribution of population between suburbs and cities. The Metro in Washington has facilitated suburban settlement of immigrants, but has also allowed D.C. residents a way to work outside the City. Some "model cities," like Newark and Oakland, draw immigrants from more popular neighboring communities. Each has easy access to the neighboring downtown (New York and San Francisco). The transportation choices of local immigrants should be studied to discern ways in which living in Baltimore City can be attractive for those working in the suburbs or D.C.

Foreign-Student Population.

Large numbers of foreign students in an area, especially thousands at one or more of the area's universities, are common where immigration is significant.

Massachusetts has seen the potential of attracting foreign students as a source of future high-skilled workers. Massachusetts has made student loan programs—usually reserved for citizens and permanent residents—accessible to foreign students. While Baltimore City has an excellent infrastructure for higher education, the percentage of foreign students is comparatively low. The largest Baltimore City university, Johns Hopkins, does not rank in the top 100 in foreign-student populations, measured against its peers like Harvard and MIT.

Retention of Baltimore's Foreign Born Residents is the First Priority

Upward Mobility in Employment.

Initial job opportunities attract immigrants, but the opportunity to change jobs for better pay is key to retaining them. No local government has worked the potential of the job ladder to attract and retain immigrants, but many smaller communities eagerly cooperate with large employers (e.g., meatpacking in Garden City, Kansas; chicken processing in Georgetown, Delaware).

Homeownership Programs.

New immigrants are almost always renters, regardless of their skill levels. Low-wage workers cannot afford expensive housing nor will they, as a rule, commute as far as higher-paid workers. But at comparable incomes, immigrants tend to be more interested in home ownership than native-born. Ultimately, retention depends on putting down roots. Access to counseling, financing, and affordable properties are all essential to the decision to live in the city.

Primary and Secondary Schooling.

A decisive factor in determining whether an immigrant family will take up permanent residence is the adequacy and

responsiveness of the local school system towards immigrant children. This is a challenge for the Baltimore City public schools, which currently have a low number of "limited English proficiency" students. However, the Catholic school system could benefit itself and the City by gearing up to serve a growing population of largely Catholic immigrants from Mexico and El Salvador.

English Instruction and Other Assistance.

Immigrants understand that facility in English is the key to economic advancement. If the State of Maryland funded guaranteed access to adult "ESL Language" classes, it would greatly enhance Baltimore City's attractiveness as an immigrant destination. Overcoming language barriers to accessing government services is also important. The primary tools are immigrant recruitment for municipal employment and the use of staff language skills creatively to assist immigrants seeking services. Training and awareness among police and other City offices can build trust in immigrant communities; building on the refugee resettlement experience, providing help for legal immigrants to become citizens, and the undocumented to become legal, would attract and retain the foreign-born. Also, many immigrant entrepreneurs begin with grocery stores and other shops targeted at fellow countrymen; a key retention goal is to facilitate this small business growth through programs of advice and access to financial assistance.

Role of Refugee Resettlement

Baltimore City has an active refugee resettlement program, but can increased refugee recruitment solve its population problem? The answer: refugee resettlement can play a part, but only a part, in a complete immigration recruitment strate-

continued on page 5

continued from page 4

gy. The annual national total of refugee admissions is approximately 70,000 to 80,000, with Baltimore City receiving only about 500. (And since September 11, 2001, these targets are not being met.) Some increase in the annual total assigned to Baltimore City is possible, but resettlement policy and the interests of resettlement agencies in other states make large increases unlikely.

Targeted Recruitment

Immigrants already in the U.S. will provide the greatest potential for recruitment to Baltimore City. Likely considerations:

1. Mexicans are the fastest growing group in Baltimore (nearly 1 percent of the population). However, this is a largely undocumented population that will need a legalization strategy.
2. Asians and Latin Americans predominate among immigrant groups nationally.
3. Many Asian nationalities have tended to settle in the suburbs of D.C. and Baltimore City. Groups that opt for the inner-city—West Indians, Salvadorans, Mexicans and Africans—provide a focus for recruitment.
4. Salvadorans and West Indians, primarily from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, are a modest presence in Baltimore City but are a big part of the D.C. area. Some are employed in Baltimore City and surrounding counties, yet commute from suburban D.C. This is a significant opportunity group.
5. African immigration is also an area of opportunity and will demonstrate that immigration growth will include adding to the City's residents of

African heritage. A large, English-speaking African nation, like Nigeria, is worthy of attention.

Aside from recruiting in Nigeria, most of the recruitment will best be done among immigrant communities already in the U.S. Nigerian immigration occurs primarily through the diversity visa lottery, the source of the first substantial flow of non-refugee, voluntary immigrants from Africa in U.S. history. Winners of the annual visa lottery can be recruited with job offers after they are selected.

Once significant numbers settle in Baltimore City, they will reach out to those still in their home countries, as well as around the U.S.

Summary of Recommendations

This initiative can begin with modest steps and be built into a larger effort over time, but it is essential that certain characteristics be incorporated from the start.

To succeed, a Baltimore City initiative to retain and attract immigrants must be coherent and strategic, rather than episodic and tactical.

The initiative has as its goal the fostering of a strategic approach to stemming Baltimore City's population decline through the attraction and retention of foreign-born residents in a manner that does not put its native-born residents at a disadvantage. It is important to ensure that this process is seen as one of addition, not displacement.

The first priority is to retain the existing immigrant population. Since retention is the first step to growth, work must be done to improve activities that help retain immigrants: recognition and respect from community leaders; the providing of job mobility; improved housing; availability of accessible primary and secondary education; and responsive policing and other public services.

The second priority is to start the recruitment process by: supporting exist-

ing communities in reaching out to attract family and friends; identifying entry level job opportunities appropriate to immigrants at both high and low skill levels; contacting the leadership of all local colleges and universities to solicit support in increasing the foreign student populations; and building political alliances for immigration programs and rules favorable to cities like Baltimore.

Specific activities should include:

1. A public-private partnership with support and participation from both and the staff and resources to promote activities in critical sectors to give substance to a marketing and recruitment program.
2. The explicit support of Mayor O'Malley and his deputies so that it will get maximum cooperation from City departments, although the effort cannot be "run" by the City government alone. The appointment of staff liaisons to the Korean and Hispanic communities is a good first step.
3. Creation of a welcoming image for Baltimore City is essential, which will require both "immigrant friendly" actions and attentive public relations efforts. An example of this is Minneapolis' roster of bilingual employees to help residents access city services. Identify all Baltimore City and community offices and groups with a substantial immigrant clientele or constituency and centralize publicity and information on services perhaps through a link on the City's website.
4. Central coordination is needed to effectively deploy the City's assets to recruit immigrants. A specifically selected coordinator is needed to organize public and private sector sup-

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

port, while pursuing the following objectives: reach out to existing immigrant communities; support and expand existing refugee recruitment efforts; enlist the Baltimore employer community to recognize and pursue the potential of immigrant employees; recruit permanent residents from existing foreign students and dramatically increase the number of foreign students in local colleges and universities.

5. A broad lobbying coalition led by Mayor O'Malley involving elected officials of other cities should be initiated to advocate changing the rules to help cities compete for immigrants and refugees. Cities have not been active in immigration debates in the past, but the fact that immigration decisions made nationally have their greatest fiscal and social impacts locally argues for a greater municipal role in shaping these policies.
6. Developing an ongoing program that actually recruits immigrants from likely sources, prepares schools and municipal services for increased immigrant participation, and orients housing and economic development programs to include immigrants.

Experience may alter the details and implementation strategy of these recommendations. However, the central requirements will remain: to address the employment, housing and services needs of current immigrants; and to use these positive interactions to jointly recruit family, friends, and countrymen to move to Baltimore.

Only with increased immigration can Baltimore City expect to grow.

Abell Salutes:

Continued from page 1

- Through the Partnership's landmark Video Patrol program, 64 cameras are now online throughout downtown. Since the installation of the cameras, robberies have declined by 43 percent along Howard Street, and by 32 percent along the historic Charles Street corridor. Car break-ins along Howard Street dipped 7 percent in 2000, and by 20 percent along Charles Street.
- Public Safety Guides serve as extra eyes and ears for the police. In the past year alone the guides aided over 232,000 people, assisted police over 180 times, and provided support to downtown businesses in nearly 60,000 cases.
- The Clean Sweep Ambassadors continue to perform the kinds of nitty-gritty activities needed to keep downtown attractive. Since 1993, the Clean Team has swept 495 tons of trash from downtown streets and removed graffiti and fliers from 8,000 locations.
- In collaboration with the City's State's Attorney's Office, the Partnership started the Downtown Court Watch Program, an initiative which is increasing community involvement in the criminal justice process and improving the disposition of "quality of life" crimes.
- The Partnership recently launched DASH, the "Downtown Area Shuttle," in order to give commuters an alternative to the daily

garage grind. A fleet of ten buses now run two routes throughout the Central Business District and downtown's West Side, with even enhanced commuter convenience.

- Dramatic progress is being made in the Partnership's initiative to improve the appearance of downtown with the installation of new sidewalks, pedestrian and street lighting, trees, flowerpots, newspaper box corrals, benches, reinforced streets, and other aesthetic enhancements.
- Through its marketing initiatives and special events, such as the First Thursday concert series, Picnics in the Park and most notably, Downtown For the Holidays, Downtown Partnership of Baltimore continues its mission to market downtown as the premier place in the region to live, work and play.

Says Partnership's president Michelle Whelley: "Nearly 80 percent of downtown property owners and tenants surveyed currently have favorable impressions of their community. The Partnership is building on that success by continually raising the bar, and working to ensure that every business in Baltimore's downtown is proud to be a part of it."

The Abell Foundation salutes Michele Whelley and the Downtown Partnership for bringing pride back to downtown Baltimore.

The full report "Immigration Is the Key to Reversing Baltimore's Population Decline" is available on The Abell Foundation's website at www.abell.org or write to: The Abell Foundation, 111 S. Calvert Street, 23rd Floor, Baltimore, MD 21202