



BALTIMORE : UN PROJET POUR SE Baigner DANS LE PORT

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A l'occasion de la Journée de la terre, le *Waterfront Partnership* - un groupement d'entreprises - a présenté un projet visant à rendre les eaux du port de Baltimore praticables pour la baignade à l'horizon 2020. La Ville, par la voix de son Maire, a fortement encouragé l'initiative, d'autant plus que les efforts de l'Etat en faveur du traitement des eaux abondent dans le même sens. Il reste à résoudre la question du financement pour un programme estimé globalement à US\$121 millions et que la Ville ne peut assumer à ce stade.

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Harboring waterfront dreams in Baltimore

Can Baltimore's funky harbor be made swimmable and fishable in a decade? That's the goal of the Waterfront Partnership, a business group that unveiled its "healthy harbor initiative" on the eve of Earth Day. The strategy calls for deploying a small floating wetland to see if it'll soak up nutrients that feed fish-killing algae blooms every spring. It also talks of "leading by example" by reducing fertilizer use and capturing rain water in cisterns.

The city's business, governmental and nonprofit elite turned out for the plan's unveiling in a festive ceremony on the 27th floor observation deck of the World Trade Center overlooking the Inner Harbor. Many encouraging words were exchanged. Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake showed up to declare: "Together we can make Baltimore's harbor clean and healthy." There was light-hearted talk of the city hosting a triathlon in 2020, with the swimming leg staged in the harbor.

That's a tall order for a body of water the city's health department now advises the public to stay out of. Michael Hankin, chairman of the business group and CEO of Brown Advisory, noted that the city's waterfront has enjoyed a renaissance that now draws thousands of visitors and residents. But he said the unsavory quality of the harbor's water, fouled as it is by sewage leaks and rain-washed street runoff, is the "big elephant in the room." It's time to change that, he said, trying out a new slogan: "It's our city; let's act like it."

Maryland Environment Secretary Shari Wilson ticked off "lots of reasons we have hope" the harbor can be made a wholesome place to recreate in the next 10 years. She noted that the state plans to upgrade the Patapsco and Back River sewage treatment plants in the next few years, and that the state plans to give the city strict new marching orders in the next year to reduce its storm-water runoff. The state will also order a cleanup of the trash littering the waterfront within the next two to three years, she said. "It's all good news today," Wilson said.

Unmentioned amid the optimism was the price tag for a cleaner harbor. After the announcement, city Public Works Director David Scott said his staff figures Baltimore will have to spend around \$12 million in the first year after the state issues a new storm-water cleanup plan to the city. The cost will approach \$30 million a year after that for at least the next couple years.

This is money the city just doesn't have right now. As it grapples to close a \$121 million budget gap now, it's threatening to cut back on its current inadequate efforts to sweep city streets and keep trash out of the harbor unless it can raise more revenues. Scott said City Hall intends to seek a storm-water fee in the next year or two to help cover the costs of a cleaner harbor. But without the fee and tax increases the mayor is seeking

this year and a storm-water fee in future, he acknowledged, the city may not be able to afford its share of the costs of a cleaner harbor. "We are facing serious budget impacts at a time when investment is needed most," Scott said.

Will taxpayers step up to make the investment? Will residents of both the city and Baltimore County make the changes in their neighborhood habits to curb the trash and filth and green the entire watershed, from Owings Mills to the harbor promenade? If so, this could be remembered as the beginning of a remarkable turnaround. If not, it'll be another moment of meaningless blather. Government can't do it all - but it needs to lead. Ten years may seem like a long time to get there, though not to turn around a problem decades in the making.

To see the plan, go *here*:

http://www.waterfrontpartnership.org/pdfs/Healthy_Harbor_Strategy.pdf

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