



*Brandon M. Scott
Mayor*

PLANNING COMMISSION

Jon Laria, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



*Tim Keane
Director*

February 26, 2026

REQUEST: The Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School INSPIRE Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval and adoption

STAFF: Jaffa Weiss, INSPIRE Planner and Marie McSweeney Anderson, Northern District Planner

PETITIONER: Department of Planning on behalf of the community organizations and institutional stakeholders of the Walter P. Carter INSPIRE area.

OWNER: Mayor and City Council and Multiple Private Property Owners

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School is a recently renovated 21st Century School, located at 820 E 43rd Street in the Wilson Park neighborhood. The original building was opened in 1976. After receiving a \$59 million renovation through the 21st Century Schools program, the new building opened to the public in January of 2021. The new school shares a building and campus with Lois T. Murray Elementary/Middle School.

General Area: The INSPIRE planning area primarily includes the Wilson Park and Pen Lucy communities, but also includes portions of surrounding Kenilworth, Richnor Springs, Winston-Govans, New Northwood, Original Northwood, Ednor Gardens-Lakeside, Guilford, Kernewood, and Radnor-Winston. The community is primarily residential and is intersected by the major roadways of York Road and East Cold Spring Lane. The school is adjacent to multiple green spaces, including Springfield Woods, a 3.5-acre urban forest on St. George's Avenue.

HISTORY

Planning for the reconstruction of the Walter P. Carter School building started with advocacy efforts in 2014. Walter P. Carter was selected as a school for the 21st Century Schools process in the second phase of construction. In 2016, the first design meeting took place. Tensions between residents were high during the design process due to a number of factors. As part of this reconstruction process, it was announced that Guilford Elementary School located on the west side of York Road would be closed and the school communities would merge. Historic tensions between the school communities made parents and neighborhood leaders concerned about the possibility of in-school and community violence due to the school communities merging. Additionally, the reconstruction and relocation of Lois T. Murray to the site did not allow space for the reconstruction of the Walter P. Carter Recreation Center which was attached

to the previous school building. While it was promised the pool would be reconstructed, residents were disappointed and angry to lose their recreation center. Rec and Parks and City Schools worked together on a MOU to allow Rec and Parks staffing to utilize school space.

Penza Bailey Architects, a firm local to the York Road corridor, was responsible for the design of the school. The construction process started in the midst of the pandemic and finished in late 2020. The school's ribbon cutting occurred in 2021, when schools were still in virtual learning. The pandemic actually helped to mitigate some of the concerns about the schools merging. When students returned to school, the administration reported that there were no instances of violence because students didn't know which school community they were coming from, they all became Walter P. Carter students when they returned. The school campus now has over 850 students attending, which includes students from Lois T. Murray. The Walter P. Carter Pool was reconstructed by Rec and Parks and reopened in summer of 2025. Residents are still advocating for reconstruction of the Recreation Center as recreational program offerings have stalled at the school.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

There are several previous community planning documents adopted by the Planning Commission regarding this site. These include the York Road Community Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (2006), the York Road Technical Assistance Panel (2013), the York Road Corridor Vision and Action Plan (2015), and the Pen Lucy Area Master Plan (2006). The INSPIRE planning document draws from previous community desires and accomplishments from these plans.

ANALYSIS

21st Century Schools Program

In the Autumn of 2010, groundwork was laid to address Baltimore City's aging and inadequate public-school buildings. Community, education advocacy groups, the school system, and other stakeholders built a coalition of support for legislation and funding to modernize Baltimore's public schools. The promise of replaced and renovated schools is meant to help transform student opportunities and achievement, provide jobs and resources to families, and help revitalize neighborhoods. These new and renovated school buildings will support excellence in teaching and learning with flexible and adaptable space, learning areas designed for interaction and collaboration, and technology equipped classrooms, and will provide communities with a shared public resource that will enrich their neighborhoods.

INSPIRE Mission and Objectives

Each modernized 21st Century school represents tens of millions of dollars of public investment into the neighborhood it serves. To leverage this investment, and to enhance the connection between the school and the surrounding neighborhoods, the Department of Planning launched the INSPIRE program, which stands for Investing in Neighborhoods and Schools, to Promote Improvement, Revitalization and Excellence. This planning program focuses on the neighborhoods surrounding each of the schools, targeting the half-mile radius around the school facilities.

Focusing on a limited geographic area allows plans to concentrate impacts around the schools so that assets and investments support the school as a community resource, build on each other, and

continue to expand further into the neighborhood. In this way, the INSPIRE plans respond to the aspirations of the neighborhood and school stakeholders in a way that is achievable. INSPIRE Plans seek to lead to improvements in the quality of life for students, their families, and neighborhood residents. The plans will also articulate the community’s long-term vision for guiding private investment, and address environmental, social, and infrastructure conditions.

The Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School INSPIRE Plan Development Process

Outreach and engagement activities for the Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School INSPIRE Plan supported the identification of school walking routes, the development of the draft recommendation report, and the review of the final plan.

The process kicked off prior to 2020 with the identification and treatment of the primary walking routes. Following delays due to staffing changes and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to complete the INSPIRE plan were renewed in late 2024. Throughout 2025, several community engagement activities were conducted by the Department of Planning to consult with residents and school staff about community conditions to identify priorities for development. This culminated in a completed draft of the report being presented for community feedback in January of 2026, with a final draft being prepared for the Planning Commission meeting of 26 February 2026.

Date	Activity	Description
March 5, 2025	Walter P Carter Steering Committee Kick Off Meeting	A virtual meeting to review the INSPIRE planning process and proposed timeline
April 1, 2025	Wilson Park Community Walk	Community Walk focused on the Wilson Park portion of the quarter mile area, specifically the area directly adjacent to the school
April 24, 2025	Data Gallery Walk	Worked with the community to determine data points of interest, printed large scale maps, and discussed potential recommendations based on the data.
June 10, 2025	Wilson Park Community Walk & Wilson Park Northern Neighborhood Community Association Meeting	Community Walk focused on the Wilson Park portion of the quarter mile area, focused on transportation and pedestrian safety, greenspace, student safety, and housing/code enforcement.
July 15, 2025	Pen Lucy Community Walk	Community walk focused on the Pen Lucy portion of the half mile area, focusing on the Old York Road commercial corridor, greenspaces, housing, and recreation.
July 16, 2025	Oral History Gathering	Gathered community stories and shared the INSPIRE process at the Blessed Sacrament Church Community Dinner.
August 12, 2025	Wilson Park Northern Neighborhood Association Meeting	Shared an update on the process and draft.

October 14, 2025	Wilson Park Northern Neighborhood Association Meeting	Shared draft recommendations for review with community leaders.
January 16, 2026	Wilson Park Northern Neighborhood Association Meeting	Shared full draft report with integrated changes for final review with community stakeholders.

There are two categories of recommendations: Standard Improvements for Primary Walking Routes and Area Recommendations.

Primary Walking Route Improvements

To strengthen the connection between the school and community, the first set of recommendations focuses on blocks that have been designated as primary walking routes. Standard improvements along these routes will help ensure that students and other community members have safer and more walkable access between the school and other community features.

Area Recommendations

The Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School INSPIRE plan includes 20 action items, ranging from supporting programming at area greenspaces to initiating discussions about larger infrastructure projects, such as the redevelopment of 4220 York Road. The plan is designed to serve as a guide for city agencies and community partners in working together to invest in the quality of life for new and legacy residents and create a safe and healthy environment for area students now and into the future.

The recommendation tables included in the full plan list strategies and actions for each of the plan’s five overarching goals. The table also includes additional details on the recommended lead and supporting agencies or organizations for each action and approximate timeframe for completion. As implementation advances, Department staff expect to update this table with cost estimates, identified or potential funding sources, and status updates on commitments and progress.

Equity:

- **Impact:** The INSPIRE program includes limited capital investment funding for every planning area and relies on partner city agencies to support implementation through the standard Capital Improvement Project process, as well as seeking other grant opportunities where available and appropriate. When it comes to infrastructure development in the Walter P. Carter EMS area, the short-term impact of the plan adoption on the surrounding community may be limited. With that said, the planning document offers guidance on multiple ways the community can advocate for improvements that address area quality of life, such as activating community open space and empowering community members with tools for advancing public health and safety. When implemented, the long-term impacts of the INSPIRE plan are expected to be beneficial and improve the quality of life for existing and future residents.

Public investment in the area and along the York Road corridor could enhance efforts to reduce existing patterns of inequity in Baltimore City. The York Road corridor has been designated a middle neighborhood, wherein strategic investment into the infrastructure and

opportunities for programming can help curtail encroaching vulnerabilities that negatively impact residents and cultivate economically and socially stable communities

- Engagement: As detailed in the prior review of the plan development process, community organizations and residents were initially engaged in the planning process prior to 2020. While the York Road corridor has received planning attention in previous years, this is the first community plan specific to the area since the Govans Elementary School INSPIRE plan. This planning process also included early outreach to the school community who may have been excluded from community planning efforts in the past.

Notification: Prior to this submission to Planning Commission, the following groups were notified: Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development; Baltimore City Department of Transportation; Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks; the York Road Partnership; the Wilson Park Northern Neighborhood Association; the Pen Lucy Community Association; the York Corridor Business Improvement District; the office of the 4th District of the Baltimore City Council; the Department of Planning's Food Policy division; and the principals and community school coordinator at Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School. Staff posted notice of this hearing at Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School and Willow Avenue Park. Notification also went out to over 950 recipients of the Northern District Newsletter.



Tim Keane
Director