



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Jon Laria, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



Tim Keane
Director

February 5, 2026

REQUEST: Street Closing/ Closing of a Portion of Light Street, Calvert Street and East Pratt Street

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Caitlin Audette

PETITIONER: Harbor Place MCB Real Estate c/o Caroline Hecker, Esq.

OWNER: City of Baltimore

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: This request involves the closing of what is popularly known as the Calvert Street spur and adjacent portions of Pratt and Light Street as shown in the attached exhibit. This is located adjacent to the Inner Harbor between Mckeldin Plaza to the northwest and the Inner Harbor promenade to the southeast. The roadway requested for closure includes up to five vehicular lanes moving to the north and east.

General Area: This site is located in the Downtown neighborhood, and is at the intersection of two main thoroughfares in the city, Pratt and Light Streets. The area is zoned C-5-IH, and is at the heart of Downtown, near many of the spaces and venues that create the identity of the neighborhood and city. These include the Inner Harbor, National Aquarium, Maryland Science Center, CFG Arena, and others.

HISTORY

- August 22, 2024 - This closure was presented to the Planning Commission as part of the Harborplace Master Plan, there was no action to take by the commission at that time.
- December 23, 2023 – The Planning Commission voted to recommend approval on three bills related to the Inner Harbor, these included an amendment to the Urban Renewal Plan, CCB #23-0448 – Urban Renewal – Inner Harbor Project I Amendment (Ordinance 24-320). This bill amended the Urban Renewal Plan to make a variety of changes, including the modification of Exhibit E, showing the right-of-way to be dedicated, and the removal of other already completed right-of-way.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

- The 2024 Comprehensive Master Plan for the City of Baltimore was enacted by Ordinance #24-426, dated December 2, 2024. The proposal aligns with the Downtown Plan that was included as part of the Comprehensive Plan and included the closure of the proposed streets to allow for the redevelopment of the Inner Harbor.

- The proposal conforms with the Inner Harbor Project I Urban Renewal Plan which was amended to include this street closure in 2023.
- The proposal conforms with the Baltimore Inner Harbor 2.0 plan which was completed in 2013 under a partnership between Waterfront Partnership, Greater Baltimore Committee, Ayers Saint Gross and the City.

PROCESS

The process for street closures in Baltimore City includes several steps. The first, prior to the introduction of legislation, is the current item. The Department of Transportation requests that the Planning Commission consider the request to review impacts of a potential street closure. After the Planning Commission's initial review, legislation is created and makes its way through the standard legislative process. This will include a return to Planning Commission, which is often completed through the consent agenda.

ANALYSIS

The area proposed for closure is five lanes of single-direction vehicular traffic between Light Street to either Pratt or Calvert Street as well as portions of both Light Street to the south and Pratt Street to the east, and a bi-directional bike lane along the southern edge of the street.

Light Street north of Pratt Street is a one-way street with traffic moving south, the spur currently allows large volumes of north bound traffic on Light Street south of Pratt to shift to east bound Pratt Street or north bound Calvert Street. The removal of this spur will require that north bound vehicular traffic on Light Street turn onto Pratt Street. The current maintenance of traffic plan for the proposed Inner Harbor development transitions a portion of Light Street north of Pratt to bi-directional traffic, allowing vehicles to move north as far as Baltimore Street. This proposal is currently under review by the Department of Transportation as part of an ongoing Developer's Agreement. The bi-directional bike lane will also be addressed in the maintenance of traffic plan for the redevelopment site to maintain the bike route in this critical corridor.

The proposed area to be closed will reduce the Light Street corridor from its current 9 lane design (the widest roadway design in all of downtown) to 6 total lanes at the intersection of Light Street and E Pratt Street. The only wider roadway near downtown is a small portion of I-95 near Westport, which has 12 lanes, many of which are separated on/off ramps. Comparably, the Downtown portion of I-83 services a greater throughput of vehicle traffic with a 7-lane design. I-83 facilitates 54,143 average annual daily trips (AADT), and the Light Street corridor facilitates 51,463 AADT according to 2024 traffic counts conducted by the Baltimore Metropolitan Council. Nearby Downtown streets are a maximum of 5 travel and turn lanes. This data indicates the current design of the Light Street corridor and spur are substantially oversized.

Modern traffic science demonstrates that roadways with more lanes than necessary can substantially increase traffic. Drivers often default to the widest route and assume it will be faster. When all drivers make this choice, however, it substantially slows all vehicle travel. Reducing travel lanes will better distribute traffic to existing infrastructure and regulate the flow of vehicles throughout downtown.

The adopted Complete Streets Manual for Baltimore City classifies this corridor as a "Downtown Commercial" which prioritizes the sidewalk and pedestrian zones for roadway design. Roads that allow vehicles to drive through at high speed do not encourage local

economic activity. Vehicle travel lanes are the second lowest priority for a well-functioning downtown commercial corridor. These corridors require pedestrians, cyclists, and residents to succeed and thrive, as non-vehicle users more efficiently stop and interact with the local economy. Downtown Baltimore is one of the most active pedestrian and cyclist zones in the City. Removing additional travel lanes where they are not required will create a positive feedback loop of increasing pedestrian safety and modal share. This street closing will better align Light Street with the design considerations required by the Complete Streets manual.

The closure of this spur has been long anticipated. Throughout planning efforts for the redevelopment of the Inner Harbor the spur's closure has been a component of the design. Downtown Rise, recently adopted by the Planning Commission, continued to recommend its closure, aligning with plans completed by the city since 2013. The City seeks to make Downtown streets work for everyone, and all modes of traffic. This will require other adjustments to traffic flow and street design. We expect to see further investments and improvements over the next five to ten years to allow this vision to be realized.

Equity:

- **Impact:**

- The closure of this spur will impact drivers who use this street as part of a path through Downtown Baltimore; typically from Interstate 395 to the west, to either Interstate 83 to the east/north or to neighborhoods east of Downtown. The removal of the spur will increase vehicular traffic along this route for those drivers.
- The closure will greatly increase public park space at the Inner Harbor as the vehicular lanes will transition to become part of the Inner Harbor Park and connect McKeldin Plaza and the Waterfront Promenade.
- The removal of the vehicular lanes will reduce the amount of lanes that a pedestrian must cross to access the public waterfront at the Inner Harbor, greatly reducing negative interactions between pedestrians and automobiles.
 - One of the few pedestrian fatalities in downtown since 2019 occurred in this spur, according to data in the Baltimore City High Injury Network.
 - Comparable roadway designs near the stadium are narrower and have fewer reported injuries and fatalities for pedestrians and cyclists.
- The closure better aligns roadway infrastructure with the approved requirements of the Complete Streets Manual.

- **Engagement:**

- The closure of this portion of street was included as part of the Inner Harbor Master Plan and part of public messaging since its announcement in October of 2023. Since that time three City Council Bills have been passed enabling the Master Plan and have included public testimony at both Planning Commission and City Council. Additionally, the developer has hosted a number of meetings beginning in the summer of 2023. Lastly, the proposal for the Inner Harbor Master Plan has also been presented to the Planning Commission and reviewed by the Urban Design and Architecture Advisory Panel.

- **Internal Operations:**

- The proposed street closure will require Department of Transportation staff to complete traffic studies to better understand the impact of such a major closure and make adjustments to streets throughout the Downtown area to allow vehicular traffic to move once this change takes place.

Notification: Notice of this action was provided over 100 individuals in the Downtown Planning District. This is in addition to the notifications of Planning Commission agendas provided via the GovDelivery system.

Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of the closure.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tim', with a stylized initial 'T' and a wavy line underneath.

Tim Keane
Director