

## MID-ATLANTIC BUILDER – NOVEMBER 2004

## THE NEW WEST SIDE STORY

By Katie Giordano

The adaptive reuse of the former Stewart's department store is gaining prominence, not just as another key project within the West Side renaissance, but also as a "green" building.

All-but-forgotten department stores, financial institutions and office buildings from the last turn of the century are once again alive and contributing to an attractive urban district on Baltimore's West Side. This time around, these buildings are housing city residents, university staff and students, along with new retailers and offices.

It took the shared vision and deep commitment of Baltimore's private and public sectors to begin to execute the West Side initiative – one of the most ambitious plans for the revitalization of downtown Baltimore since the redevelopment of the Inner Harbor three decades earlier. In 1998, stakeholders and property owners from the private sector – realizing the economic and cultural potential of the once-flourishing retail district commissioned Design Collective, a Baltimore-base architecture and planning firm, to construct a strategic plan for redeveloping the West Side. The ultimate goal of the initiative is to revitalize the historic retail district, transforming what was once a single-use, commercial area into a thriving, multi-use urban neighborhood.

Baltimore's historic retail district is a 24-block area within the roughly 100-block West Side. Between 1920 and 1960, the area surrounding the intersection of Howard and Lexington Streets, along with the adjacent Lexington Market, was the hub of Baltimore's shopping district. The bustling West Side served all of Baltimore's neighborhoods via a vast public transit network of buses and trolleys. But in the post-World War II era, the middle class began its exodus to the suburbs, as they did in so many other industrial cities. With the loss of its primary use, and with functionally obsolete building stock, the West Side fell into general decline. Activity on the streets in the West Side virtually came to a halt, department stores and banks closed, buildings were abandoned and criminal activity rose.

The challenge facing Design Collective was multifaceted. The firm needed to define a strategy that would reverse decades of decline, appease a diverse group of stakeholders, and attract developers and investors with a realistic, market-driven and mixed-use plan.

The plan recommends adaptive reuse of more than 250 historic structures, 2,400 residential units, 700,000 square feet of higher education and medical system facilities, 400,000 square feet of office space, 250,000 square feet of retail and entertainment space, an 850-room convention headquarters hotel, and important public transportation, open space, infrastructure and streetscape improvements.



### THE STEWART'S BUILDING



The adaptive reuse of the former Stewart's Department Store, which sat vacant for 20 years, is gaining prominence, not just as another key project within the West Side renaissance but also as a "green" building. The project is both Maryland Historical Trust award-winning and LEED-certified. The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating recognizes achievements in sustainable design, indoor air quality, energy efficiency, water savings, use of recycled materials and Smart Growth. The \$24 million renovation, funded by The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, flawlessly blended historic preservation and sustainable design into the creation of 250,000 square feet of Class A research, academic, technology and telecommunication offices, supported by 30,000 square feet of ground-level, neighborhood-oriented retail to support area residents, office workers and visitors.

The conversion of the retail space into a thriving technology center will be Design Collective's first LEED certified project. Excellent access to pre-existing infrastructure and public transportation, innovative MEP systems, careful attention to indoor environmental quality, and the use of high recycled content and locally produced materials are all hallmarks of this project.

Working within the existing urban environment afforded the design team a number of unique opportunities. Typical of these opportunities is the building's use of district chilled water to provide cooling to the building, similar in concept to district steam heating that is frequently found in downtown business districts. The utilization of district chilled water proved to be a success in many ways. Comfort Link, the district chilled water utility, uses remote redundant central chiller plants to produce and store ice during off-peak hours, reducing the cost of the electricity used to produce the cooling and reducing the peak load on the electrical utility during the heat of the day. The building owner, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, reduced their up-front costs by purchasing a simple plate-and-frame heat exchanger in lieu of investing in all of the cooling towers, chillers, etc. required for a traditional stand-alone cooling system.

The design team achieved greater flexibility because the footprint required by the mechanical system was greatly reduced and rooftop mechanical equipment was eliminated. Most importantly, the installed system has the capability of delivering anywhere between 400 and 1,600 tons of cooling without any significant pieces of the mechanical system. This affords tenants greater flexibility by accommodating changing cooling requirements over time, and should prolong the service life of the base building mechanical system as the flexibility to meet a variety of cooling loads is designed in to the system and there are very few moving parts to wear out.

The decision to utilize the district cooling option was made after an exhaustive analysis of a number of alternative mechanical system designs by the entire design team. This level of comparison and analysis was typical for all the different systems and materials specified for the project. The collaborative interaction between all members of the design team has allowed the team to produce an integrated project that in analysis has made the best use of the available resources and minimized the negative impacts of the building on the environments.

Also celebrated as part of the West Side rebirth are the Hippodrome Theatre, the Centerpoint and the Zenith buildings.

### THE HIPPODROME THEATER

The Hippodrome Theater's grand opening, slated for February 10, 2004, marked a major milestone in the West Side's transformation. Design Collective's strategic plan identified the potential to restore the historic vaudeville theater and adjacent bank buildings on Eutaw Street into a regional performing arts center (The France-Merrick Performing Arts Center) that would draw patrons from as far away as New York. The \$67 million, 2,220-seat theater has been meticulously restored to its original grandeur and is expected to draw more than 400,000 patrons per year.

### THE CENTERPOINT

The Centerpoint project includes the adaptive reuse of the historic Town Theater, the old Paramount Hotel and several historic cast-iron buildings, together with new selective infill development. In response to the strategic plan's recommendations, the City of Baltimore acquired the block, relocated existing businesses (some within the new development), selected the developers through a public RFP process and approved a 20-year PILOT for the project. The \$60 million mixed-use development began construction in March 2003, and is currently pre-leasing the more than 400 luxury rental units anticipated to be ready for occupancy before the end of 2004.

### THE ZENITH

Soaring above the busy intersection of Pratt and Paca Streets, the Zenith will stand as one of Baltimore's main points of entry, welcoming visitors and residents into the West Side renaissance district. The 22-story glass curtain wall and masonry tower designed by Design Collective will house 200 luxury rental apartments, a 253-space parking garage and a 24-hour grand-floor restaurant. Floor-to-ceiling windows in the majority of the units will provide unparalleled views of Baltimore's skyline and Camden Yards, while the building itself will offer a rooftop swimming pool, a courtyard sundeck, a fitness center and a party room. Scheduled to open in Summer 2005, the Zenith will make downtown living more desirable than ever.