

Industrial Sector and Trucks Vital to Baltimore

Land use and zoning issues are threatening the industrial business base along Baltimore City's waterfront from Curtis Bay to Canton.

by Michael Fickes

Baltimore City's tough, no-nonsense industrial waterfront workers and their bosses won't forget what Menelek Hendricks did for them in 2009.

A high-school lad from Baltimore's North Avenue, Hendricks rode the bus for an hour every day after school to get to his maritime co-operative internship at Rukert Terminals.

In 2009, Baltimore's waterfront industries, including Rukert, had combined forces to lobby for the extension of MIZOD (Maritime Industrial Overlay District) through 2024.

Hendricks learned about MIZOD when he overheard colleagues discussing how the extension would protect the waterfront and waterfront jobs from commercial and residential development for 15 years — but only if it passed.

Hendricks asked his boss to let him testify for the measure before the City Council. At first the answer was no. But he kept asking until he got his way.

And he was eloquent. The City Council and audience fell silent as Hendricks passionately explained that Baltimore

City's industrial companies were his future. With his internship, he was training himself to work on the waterfront. If the MIZOD proposal failed and companies left or got pushed out by mixed-use developments, he would lose the greatest opportunity of his young life.

"It was one of those moments that sometimes occur when a person of little experience decides to speak truth to power and manages to remind powerful people of their responsibilities," says Stuart Fitzgibbon, the refinery manager at American Sugar Refining, Inc.'s Domino Sugar plant in Locust Point and chair of the Baltimore Industrial Group, a coalition of industrial organizations formed to lobby the city for industry rights. "His story is our story. It illustrates how important waterfront industries are to city people and to the city's economic health."

Baltimore City's industrial base provides stable, long term, good paying blue-collar jobs for people who live in the city. In recent years, however, commercial developers have begun to

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compete fiercely for waterfront sites that will accommodate mixed-use projects with residences, shops and offices. The problem is, residents and industry make poor close neighbors. Manufacturers, with their rumbling trucks, clanking trains, screaming ships and 24-hour operations, make residents angry. And when they complain, city officials are expected to restrict hours of operation, streets and routes available to trucks and all-night train traffic.

MIZOD was a victory for the industrial community that is trying to protect itself from redevelopment. MIZOD will protect the waterfront. The next step is to participate in the city's ongoing re-zoning project and ensure that zoning efforts account for industry needs.

The re-zoning goal for the city's industries is, once again, to protect themselves from mixed-use developments. In the re-zoning effort, they

won't oppose new development – that's not the point. Instead, they will work to ensure that buffer zones protect residences from industrial areas, which will in turn protect industry from residents that want peace and quiet. Sufficient space between industry and residential developments is really all that's required.

Industry also wants to establish designated truck routes so that companies can get their shipments out of the city and onto the road efficiently. Trucks have to have access to routes leading to and from the city's industrial areas.

The Re-zoning Battle

The Domino Sugar plant offers an example of a typical zoning problem.

Domino is a long-term industrial business providing good paying jobs. The plant has operated continuously in Locust Point since it was commissioned in 1922. It employs 590 high school graduates paid an average of \$70,000 per year. The plant's direct payroll exceeds \$50 million per year. Indirect jobs created in the trucking industry and other industries that the refinery touches total about 1,200. Salaries paid for those jobs inject more than \$100 million per year into the local economy. All told, the plant's economic impact in the Baltimore region has grown to more than \$150 million per year.

One of the reasons extending MIZOD was so important to Baltimore's industrial businesses stands a couple hundred feet southeast of the Domino plant. It is a waterfront residential development called Silo Point. Fitted stylishly into the old B&O Railroad grain terminal, the property is right next to the railroad track that services the sugar plant.

Predictably, residents complain about the noise the trains make when they chug over to Domino early every morning to pick up shipments. Leading a tour group through Domino one day, Fitzgibbon took a question from a woman who lived near the plant in

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Locust Point: "Why do the trains have to arrive at 5:00 a.m.?" she asked.

Fitzgibbon explained that Domino ships product 24/7 and that those rail cars are lifelines to customers. Did she understand? Maybe. Maybe not. "Today's city dwellers are different," Fitzgibbon says. "Their parents didn't work in the city's manufacturing plants. They don't understand industry."

But they do understand loud trains early in the morning.

MIZOD will protect the waterfront for the time being, while the rezoning project, if it meets its goals, will help to keep Baltimore City's new, wealthy and influential residents in condos, townhouses and apartments that don't directly abut the property of a noisy manufacturing plant and its trucks, trains and ships.

Trucks Are Essential

Residents also complain about trucks driving through their neighborhoods. "If we don't establish and preserve truck routes, companies will leave the city," says Jeff Fraley, who owns Fraley Corporation, a heavy equipment contractor doing business in Curtis Bay and Fairfield. "They'll go to Norfolk, which is open to industry and recruiting industrial businesses for its port."

A number of years ago, when the city closed Boston Street to truck traffic, there was a close call. The Boston Street closing combined with new residential development created congestion and generated complaints about trucks in Fells Point. The hubbub drove Belt's Transportation Services Inc. out of Fells Point. "We moved to Highlandtown," says John Redding, vice president and general manager of Belt's.

Today, Belt's uses Dundalk Avenue. "But now there are people asking to bar truck traffic from Dundalk Avenue," Redding says.

Jessica A. Keller, chief of planning with Baltimore City's Department of Transportation, sees all of these problems as they ebb and flow across the city. "It's getting worse," she says. "For example, we know that the area from I-95 to Harbor East will soon experience congestion like no one has seen before."

In addition, Keller indicates that the city is promoting mixed-use development.

At the same time, however, Keller says city officials are aware of the sparks caused by residential mixed-use properties built next to industrial properties, and they are working to smooth things out.

Another effort is attacking traffic congestion. According to Keller, people who live outside the city and drive into the



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city to work contribute to the congestion. Those cars plus truck traffic and other business traffic overwhelm the streets. "The goal is to find ways for people to live here and to work here," continues Keller. "...and make room for trucks."

Then again, people want to move into the city. "That's the ultimate problem to solve," Keller says. And with the proactive work of groups like the Maryland Motor Truck Association, Baltimore Industrial Group and South Baltimore Business Association, solutions are at hand. Guided by principals of connectivity, safety, quality of life and efficiency, representatives of these business groups have taken a proactive approach and recommended actions to reduce traffic conflicts.

City officials have welcomed the input. They understand that goods travel their last mile by truck and trucks are key to supporting the city's commercial and residential centers, that a solid blue-collar employment base provided by the industrial sector is

essential to the city's balance and that a strong industrial sector needs sound zoning laws and safe, efficient truck routes to thrive.

Not Just a Big City Problem

Small cities are facing land use challenges similar to those roiling Baltimore City. Take Salisbury, for example.

With 25,000 residents, Salisbury is tiny compared to Baltimore, but it is also the second largest port city in the state, thanks to its location on the Wicomico River, which leads to the Chesapeake Bay.

Salisbury is home to agricultural industries such as Perdue Farms; electronic component manufacturers such as Toroid, which makes transformers; shipbuilders such as Chesapeake Shipbuilding Corp.; and pharmaceutical manufacturers like Tishcon Corporation.

The Farmers and Planters Company of Salisbury distributes agricultural supplies across the Salisbury region. "We make noise and produce dust," says Charles Otto, a member of the company's board of directors. "Currently, the city is considering a revitalization project that would put condos not far away from us. But condos aren't compatible with industrial areas like this."

Otto and other industrial businesses along the Salisbury waterfront are trying to make their voices heard above the chorus that favors residential and mixed use development in areas long considered too close to Salisbury's 24-hour-a-day industries.

Five Years Left

The concerted effort by industry and government couldn't come too soon. It may seem impossible that Baltimore

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could lose its industrial base. But it isn't impossible. It's happened in other cities, and it has just happened in Toronto.

Officials opened up Toronto to mixed-use development years ago. Commercial developers flooded in. City officials failed to manage the zoning issues raised by the new projects. Eventually, the new developments began to crowd the industrial areas. Soon, industrial firms began to leave.

Today, Red Path Sugars, another American Sugar Refining brand,

stands as the only manufacturer remaining in downtown Toronto. That plant has always relied on the railroad for shipping. But the railroad, finding it impossible to live off of one industrial customer, just eliminated service to downtown. Meanwhile, a four-star hotel is going up several feet from the plant's property line.

"If we don't keep working on zoning and truck routes, what happened to Toronto will be Baltimore's future," says Fitzgibbon. ▲

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