



February 26, 2016

B&P Tunnel Project

Baltimore, MD 21217

Attn: Ms. Odessa Phillip, PE
Environmental Project Manager
Baltimore City Department of Transportation

Re: Proposed B&P Tunnel Project through Reservoir Hill Community

Dear Ms. Phillip:

I am writing to express the grave concerns of Healthy Neighborhoods, Inc. ("HNI") about the proposed Baltimore and Potomac (B& P) Tunnel Project that would construct four tracks underneath the historic Reservoir Hill Community as well as the Midtown Edmondson Historic District. The construction of the tunnels will do damage to historic homes in historic districts. These tunnels would increase considerably the number of trains passing through the west Baltimore communities and accommodate double-stack freight trains. As proposed, there could be two trains in each tunnel (eight under the Reservoir Hill neighborhood) at any given time causing severe impacts to the quality of life throughout the neighborhood and concerns about noise and vibration. In addition to the

underground construction, a ventilation shaft measuring approximately 100'x200'x50' would be constructed in the heart of the Reservoir Hill Historic District on land now used for the Whitelock Community Farm. The farm is a unique meeting place in a very diverse community. It grows produce in a community which needs access to healthier food products. No assurance has been given that dangerous chemicals and oil and gas will not be carried through the tunnels.

Healthy Neighborhoods is a partnership of banks, foundations, government and community organizations that helps strong but undervalued neighborhoods increase home values, market their communities, create high standards for property improvement and forge strong connections among neighbors. The revitalization of Reservoir Hill has been one of Baltimore's success stories. We have financed \$23 million of neighborhood improvements that include purchase and rehab of homes, loans and matching grants to homeowners for home improvements, as well as capital improvements and block level neighborhood enhancements. Most recently, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development awarded a grant of over \$750,000 to HNI to continue rehabilitation of vacant homes on the 2200-2300 blocks of Callow Avenue and to make capital improvements at the Whitelock Farm. HNI investments in Reservoir

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Reservoir Hill is a beautiful, historic residential neighborhood adjacent to Druid Hill Park. It is home to stately Victorian town homes, restored apartment buildings, and a diverse mix of residents from all backgrounds and all walks of life who together function as a unified community. About 30% of the housing remains affordable to low-income families as a result of public sector use restrictions. The proposed B&P Tunnel threatens this community and the housing market with potential for community disruption, noise and vibrations, damage to homes, as well as environmental and related health impacts of train traffic in the residential areas.

Our concerns include:

Damage to historic homes

Reservoir Hill boasts one of the most diverse, intact collections of late 19th and early 20th century urban architecture in Baltimore City; and borders the second largest urban park in the country, Druid Hill Park. The community is an important part of the Jewish and African-American history of Baltimore. The neighborhood is one of the largest areas of historic homes on the East Coast, consisting primarily of two to three story brick houses, generally 100-150 years old. There are also large historic apartment buildings as well as historic synagogues and churches. The 20 or so remaining vacant homes are particularly vulnerable.

Homeowners are concerned about the construction impacts and the effect of noise and vibrations on their homes. They are concerned about the depth of the tunnel and the potential for structural damage, even collapse of houses during and after tunnel construction due to earth settling, flooding as well as earthquake. On Callow Avenue several long vacant homes are under redevelopment for sale to homeowners earning less than 120% of the Area Median Income. The architect and contractor believe that the vibrations during construction alone will cause shifting of the foundations, nail pops and cracks in dry wall or plaster. That was the experience during the construction of Baltimore's subway.

Damage to the mixed-income housing market

After years of disinvestment, Reservoir Hill has begun to see a comeback. Vacant homes have been rehabbed and grand homes that had been subdivided and neglected by outside investors have now been transformed with single family owner-occupants that are new to the neighborhood. Long-term homeowners have also benefited with increased home values and renewed confidence in the neighborhood to make interior and exterior home improvements. As values increase so too do state and local tax bases.

As always in Baltimore, improving neighborhoods and the housing market is fragile. The tunnel proposal rightfully has residents concerned about noise and vibration. They worry that infrastructure -- roads, gas lines, water mains, power grid systems -- may become compromised due to construction and train activities. Discussions of the proposed tunnel and the negative impact have sparked concern as well as talk about potential plans to leave the neighborhood. Project management's references to evacuation plans fuel concerns.

Harm to one of the few diverse communities in Baltimore

Residents value Reservoir Hill for its diversity – as one resident wrote on the Live Baltimore website: *I love my neighborhood of Reservoir Hill because it brings together so many across race, class and religious lines - plus, one of the city's greatest gems: Druid Hill Park!* In markets where there is significant property appreciation there is a risk of losing affordable housing units and concerns that lower income households will get pushed out but not in Reservoir Hill. In a comprehensive study that was commissioned by HNI in 2006, the Community Law Center found that Reservoir Hill had over 945 income-restricted units. Although the period the units must be maintained as both income and rent restricted truly varies, the study found that most of the units carry use restrictions that require they be preserved for at least the next 20-30 years.

If disruptions from construction and concerns about noise and vibration drive out the middle class or upper-income homeowners, the diversity of the community will be lost. Those left behind, mostly will suffer the most from any of the negative consequences that the B&P Tunnel project may pose.

Harm to one of the first newly built 21st Century Schools

Plans are underway to rebuild John Eager Howard Elementary School located just one full block away from the proposed site of the tunnels and ventilation shaft. This is one of the first schools to be renovated under the \$1.1 billion investment in schools construction and renovation through the 21st-Century Schools Buildings planning process, a partnership of the state and city. The investment represents a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to drive improvement not only for schools in Baltimore City, but also for their surrounding neighborhoods including Reservoir Hill.

Design development has been completed and construction documents are being developed. The architects for the new school have not been directed to take into account the impacts of construction or vibrations from trains in the design of the new school. The schematic design has ball fields, a playground, basketball courts and community garden space along Brookfield Avenue, Ducatel Street, and Linden Avenue – the area of the school site closest to the proposed ventilation shaft. To state the obvious, the school and recreation center will be central meeting places for the community's youth.

Location of the ventilation shaft / Loss of the Whitelock Community Farm

There are significant concerns about the environmental and related health impacts of train traffic in the residential areas. This concern is exacerbated by the site and size of the proposed ventilation shaft directly across the street from the Whitelock Community Farm. The proposed location of the ventilation tower, at the south side of the intersection of Brookfield Avenue and Whitelock Street, is currently used by the Reservoir Hill neighborhood as an extension of the Whitelock Community Farm.

Whitelock Street, once a neighborhood commercial corridor, suffered years of disinvestment and became the center of a thriving drug trade drawing negative attention and crime to Reservoir Hill with easy access on and off major thoroughfares. In recent years, the community has begun to attract new investment, reclaiming vacant land for positive neighborhood activity. The Whitelock Community Farm has grown over the past few years, providing fresh produce to the community and a community gathering place. Recognizing this positive activity, HNI has made a recent commitment to the farm for capital improvements. It is a meeting place for young and old and families and gardeners.

The location of the ventilation shaft threatens the farm's existence and its important role as a community gathering place and in providing fresh food to Reservoir Hill residents. The ventilation shaft also threatens other centers of community life including the St. Francis Neighborhood Center, John

Howard Eager Elementary School, a new revitalized playground that received significant investment from the Baltimore Ravens, and Linden House, a historic renovation into apartments for formerly homeless women and their children. Residents are concerned about dangerous diesel fumes and other emissions that could significantly impact air quality in the neighborhood. As you know full well, there is a history of fire in Baltimore's old railroad tunnels.

Safety and danger from explosion and fires

Residents want to feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods and are concerned about the potential dangers if freight trains transport hazardous materials or chemicals under their homes. There is a well-documented history of accidents and fires in tunnels in Baltimore City. The Lake Megantic, Quebec crude oil explosion is cited as a worst case scenario. Residents have been informed that the B&P Tunnel Project could include hazardous materials such as petroleum (crude oil), chemical (propane, chlorine, etc.) and nuclear products. Residents are rightly concerned about the potential hazards from fire, explosion, and poison. They also worry that the tunnel could be a target for terrorism. Baltimore city and the federal government are making plans to protect Lake Montebello and Druid Hill Park from terrorists.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these concerns. We know that there are better alternatives that can be explored and that the B&P Tunnel will not proceed as currently proposed with its potential to harm Reservoir Hill or other West Baltimore communities.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Sissman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark Sissman
President