

# Walking the Highway to Nowhere:

A guided tour documents past harms, engages present struggles, and imagines radical possibilities in West Baltimore

<https://community.ecodesigncollective.org/walking-the-highway-to-nowhere/>

*On September 21st, 2023, Ecological Design Collective curator Cristina Murphy and community guides led a walking tour of Baltimore's infamous "Highway to Nowhere" (H2NOW)—the 1.4 mile ditch that displaced nearly 1,500 residents and separates neighborhoods in West Baltimore. Baltimore City Planner Martin French and community activist Eric Stephenson provided commentary throughout the walk, discussing the bungled infrastructure project and its impact on Baltimore's historic Black neighborhoods. This walking tour was designed to give attendees an embodied understanding of the devastation that the H2NOW inflicts on public space—with an eye towards the possibilities and radical potentials that lie just over the horizon.*

*Find the transcript of the walking tour video below:*

## **00:00:15 - Christina Murphy:**

Hi, guys. Good afternoon and welcome to the walk along the highway to nowhere. I am very nervous because this is a big responsibility for me and it is a place that I am very dear about and there's a lot of money involved to make it better. And I just want to communicate my passion. And it's very difficult for me because I'm a very passionate person and I will definitely flunk this conversation, this introduction, but I will try it nonetheless.

So hi everybody. Welcome to this tour. I would like to start with EDC. Thank you to Anand and Jonas without which this event could not have happened. Seriously and to continue my thing. Thank you. Thank you. Martin for being here. I will pass the baton to you very shortly. Right into that for an introduction. Introduction. Back of House announcement: There is going to be a little bit of pollution, noise pollution a little bit, and also air pollution. We do have masks if you care to wear one or double mask yourself.

## **00:01:20 - Christina Murphy:**

So I am Christina Murphy. I'm an associate professor at the school of Architecture and Planning at Morgan. I'm also an adjunct professor at Virginia Tech. I have my own office and I come from Italy slash the Netherlands. I am a co-curator of EDC, the Ecological Design Collective.

If you guys do not know it, please ask us and we will be willing to give you the extension for it. Sign up with us, there are amazing conversations that you can join in. We are a collective for ecological design. We seek to approach global and local challenges, in democratic and collaborative spirit. We are seeking to build a community for social, economic and environmental

justice, one whose most important lesson will arise from the juxtaposition of radical, different perspectives. So please join us.

**00:02:30 - Christina Murphy:**

So today, today we're here because we ask ourselves a few questions. Why some decisions have been made? Why were some bad decisions allowed? How is it visible to displaced people, destroy thousands of homes and excavate a highway? Which functionality which destroyed basically functional and well-being communities?

The action of excavating this infrastructure caused the intentional demolition of 971 homes, 62 businesses subsequently displacing approximately 1500 community members. But before this, before the seventies, this community, because it happened in the seventies, before the seventies these communities were connected. Today's this community are devastated. What a waste that was. This decision was not only did this did not only destroy the lives of people in the seventies who have been displaced in their homes demolished, but it is also jeopardizing the future of the current population.

These communities have lost an immense real estate value and their identity. People left not only because their home has been destroyed, but because their home has lost value. Will a home from the highway to nowhere ever be repaired During this walk? Please Let's reflect on the meaning of home—and what it means to lose one.

Let's be aware of the deep injustice brought upon people who have little or no voices on their destinies. A year ago I launched a studio in my school. I Morgan where the students were looking at this infrastructure. Today, some of my students are here and they are looking at it again under the perspective, under the point of view of what can we do to make things a little bit more respectful.

And what we are doing is a place keeper. It's an installation and it's a place for protest. So we are designing an installation on paper. Hopefully one day we will have the budget to design it, to build it as well, where people can express themselves and protest. Assuming that the highway—this is the synopsis of the course—that the highway to nowhere becomes obsolete and it's taken over by people and declared as the largest public space in North America.

We ask: Can we design for protest? What is public space? How is democracy spatially recognized? How should a democratic space look like? Thank you to my students that are here. They will present their manifesto as soon as we get to the highways. You know all that. Thank you, Evan, Tiffany, Shamar, and Roberson. Martin, would you like to introduce yourself?

**00:05:36 - Martin French:**

It's the first I've been behind one of these in my life. I believe some of you may be able to tell by my white hair that once upon a time I listen to people talking to bullhorns, protesting something else. A war. First thing I'd like to ask you before I introduce myself as please look around and see if you can spot any buildings that are original to this area.

To my knowledge, it's exactly one in our view at this moment. It's across the street. Everything else you see was replaced at one time or another by something else. You are standing in what was first a public housing development which obliterated lots and lots of housing and other buildings that were declared slums and then was later replaced with what you see today.

My name is Martin French. I work for the Baltimore City Planning Department and the Land Use and Urban Design Division. And one of the things I do is to name just a few of the things I've encountered over the years is representative on zoning appeals.

**00:06:57 - Community Member:**

So will they be bringing it in the middle? Because that's what the whole community wants. Somebody should have put out fliers to all the people in the community and the home owners as well, because we don't want nothing coming through our community, tearing up our property.

**00:07:22 - Martin:**

You've already had it torn up enough, and that's the point. Okay. That said, I think what we're going to move over to the other side of the highway.

So we're going to come out here, walk up the sidewalk next to the market, into the boulevard here, and get under the highway to nowhere. Of course, on the other side, there is a fence over there where hopefully we will meet Eric Stephenson, who is vice chair of our planning commission and also a resident of the Harlem Park, will be heading along the South shortly. Thank you.

**00:07:58 - Martin French:**

Welcome to the other piece of the redevelopment of this area. Again, you can look around and see absolutely nothing left except that park pavilion across the street, of the original neighborhood. And that park pavilion actually was saved twice.

It was going to be torn down for the public housing that used to be here and had to be saved the second time when the public housing was blown up. It was high rise public housing for families. It was basically just denounced, appropriately, as warehousing for the poor. And there were probably a couple of thousand people living on this site at that time. Likewise for the site you just left across the street, and it's been replaced with much lower density residential housing and also with mixed tenure housing. Some of these are owned. Some of these are rented. So it's something that public housing in the olden days was not allowed to be by the federal law.

We're going to be going, I believe, this way, to walk along side the highway to nowhere, which so far we've just gone underneath the bridges we passed under. One other thing, couple of things you might notice. Number one, what a very effective barrier that boulevard is to wanting to get into the downtown that was deliberately placed there in order to separate the public housing that used to be here from the downtown. It was basically a reaction to the Riot of 1968. And the idea was, if we keep those people out of downtown, we won't have problems, simply

put. The highway to nowhere became a part of that strategy, too, unfortunately. So we'll proceed this way.

**00:09:45 - Martin French:**

Yeah. All right, We're at the corner of Fremont and Franklin—Sorry this is Murphy, I take it back—what was Franklin street over here. If you look that way you can see Old Baltimore, exemplified in its architecture. You live on this side, of course, you are seeing the new redevelopment that took the place of public housing. You have to kind of imagine that once upon a time, you know, like a hundred years ago or 75 years ago, both sides of the street, 75 years ago were pretty much the same.

Today, of course, it's quite different. Second thing is, Fremont here is a very, very old road, goes back to colonial times, was known as Cobe Road... you can look on a map, see it go straight on down to the end of what's now called the middle branch, where the park is today. It was basically a road for rolling tobacco barrels all the way down to the wharf down there so they could be shipped over to Great Britain. It was renamed to Fremont, I believe, in the middle of the 19th century for John Fremont, a war hero in the United States at that time.

Anyway, what happened here basically was the demolition of a whole section of once thriving community here in West Baltimore to make way for public housing. Back in the 1930s. In the 1930s it was called slum clearance. It's kind of hard to imagine that, those are slums, but that's what the people in charge called them, and they had money from the federal government to make it happen.

And they did. So they built the public housing high rises and this area became, unfortunately, because public housing, high rises were not thought out well, a serious location for major crime and high rises themselves were notorious for places where the police wouldn't even dare to go. So of course, the gangs took over and it made life miserable. But they lasted because nobody at HUD in Washington was willing to give the order. "Yep. you can tear that stuff down it was a mistake." People had built their professional reputations on that high rise public housing until they retired nothing could move. So the housing authority basically was stuck with those buildings for about 30 years. And then finally it got the approval from HUD to start emptying them and tearing them down.

A lot of the public housing tenants or their families were children, had to be moved somewhere else. A lot of them ended up in other public housing developments that are still around today, or they were moved onto the Section eight program and sent out to the private rental market. The same thing happened across the street that was Lexington Terrace, another public housing high rises for families was developed. So just imagine what happened when the property became vacant for a few years until they could actually demolish the buildings. Demolishing— the process was called implosion because they had a specialist firm come in, set dynamite charges in the right places, and they blew the buildings up and then haul out the concrete.

**00:13:05 - Martin French:**

Also, I just wanted to ask those of you who have got an architecture interest to note these buildings here, the new ones. Try to pick out the units that are the public housing. They're not supposed to be visible from the non-public housing units. Also note a simple detail but one that took a lot of fighting. That building over there. Well, notice the brickwork on the front, wraps the corner? There was a lot of struggle over getting the contractor and for the buildings to agree to wrap the corner with brick. They usually just want to put a straight flat facade wall up from one side and meet the brick at this corner. So the idea was to make this much more visually appealing redevelopment from the typical suburban stuff you can see today.

**00:13:51 - Martin French:**

And now, I believe, was supposed to have also a little bit of history and some proposals from some of the students. So I'm going to turn this over to the first one who's willing to step up and take part.

**00:14:12 - Roberson Bateau:**

Hi, my name is Roberson. I am doing protest for the low-income families of Kathleen in Harlem Park, and I would like to use the Social Security building over there as one of the landmarks to represent those residents and low-income families and everything. So I have my— in my flyer, you can see the Social Security Service building with the American brewery, which also represents their neighborhood as a landmark. So I would like to do the same thing for this neighborhood. There's a QR code on my flyer, if you guys would like to follow my work in the future, any ideas, any questions you might have about my work, don't hesitate to contact me. I also left my email inside my slides. Any idea you guys may want to give me feedback.

**00:15:23 - Shamar Roberts:**

My name is Shamar Roberts. I'm a graduate student at Morgan State, and with my protest, I intend to advocate for the families that were displaced by the highway to nowhere. So with my concept, I hope to erect a structure for community and social gatherings, as well as a space to memorialize the families that were displaced by the erection of the highway to nowhere. On my flyer is a QR code if you want to scan and follow my progress throughout the semester. Thank you.

**00:16:13 - Evan Cage:**

Hello, everyone, my name is Evan Cage. I'm also a graduate student at Morgan State and for my protest, I intend to design for the squeegee boys of Baltimore who, I guess you know, were kind of affected by displacement. But I feel like it's mostly because of lack of job opportunity and education in the area. So I intend to design a space where both of those opportunities can be supported and sustained for a long period of time.

**00:17:34 - Tiffany Oduro:**

Hi, my name is Tiffany Oduro. I'm a senior grad student at Morgan State University. For my part of the project, I'll be designing for the families who were displaced or affected by the highway to nowhere. I'll be creating a space—maybe a pavilion—where they can share their stories and

memories of what they lost and the highway to nowhere and all. Follow me on the QR code on my poster/flyer!

**00:18:01 - Martin French:**

Now we're actually going to walk along highway to nowhere, up the sidewalk over there and basically what you're going to notice is how the highway is an incredible divider between this part of West Baltimore and that part of West Baltimore. Believe it or not, that entire highway to nowhere, is public property: It belongs to the city of Baltimore. It's public right-of-way.

You may have noticed as we walked up Martin Luther King Boulevard on your left. There was a large area of chain link fencing with plastic and a locked gate— that is public property. But the city doesn't want homeless people to camp on it, so they've got it fenced and blocked. Just so you know. Okay, we're going to head this way.

**00:18:51 - Cristina Murphy:**

Hi, everybody. Sorry. Come up here. I would like to introduce Eric to you, which is our— I wouldn't say "second"— it's our other guide. By a raise of hands: How many people have walked the highway to nowhere before? Okay well, I hope so, my students. Very good. Okay.

**00:19:08 - Eric Stephenson:**

Good evening everybody— Eric Stephenson, resident of Harlem Park and Sandtown neighborhoods here and to our north and also member of the Baltimore City Planning Commission. Thanks for coming out and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

**00:20:01 - Martin French:**

Just as kind of an editorial comment. Notice behind you there is a vacant lot; there was once housing on this lot. One of the byproducts of the highway to nowhere has been the loss of buildings, loss of housing that was never actually part of the original construction site, but is the ripple effect that happens when you tear apart an area and you basically persuade people this is not a good place to live anymore. Houses get abandoned and collapsed or the city tears them down preemptively. You look at this problem still continuing right across the street. One of the challenges the city faces, trying to get people interested in reoccupying some of this housing, that is a big problem on both sides of the highway to nowhere. So we'll continue.

**00:20:43 - Eric Stephenson:**

For the students, when we were reviewing your project last week, some of you had cultural institutions and other items, medical institutions that you may have pulled off of Google Maps that you had on your sort of land use and site plans. So I encourage you to observe in reality how many of those things that you see on Google are really here.

**00:21:44 - Martin French:**

Sorry to bring people up so short so quickly. Just happened to notice that sign that got posted on this house here, that's empty. See it says "investor wanted." There are people have bought

these houses on speculation, sometimes they bought them from the city out of tax foreclosure sales. And they aren't even trying to market them to people who want to live in them and, you know, own them and live in them.

**00:22:05 - Martin French:**

Just as you pass by this building, note the cornerstone: 1901. This was a very active and very tight community a hundred years ago.

**00:22:34 - Eric Stephenson:**

So first of all, as we walk past these blocks, I definitely encourage everyone to look up the blocks and check out the condition of the housing on both sides. And most of these blocks, we don't have time to walk up and down every block, but you can get a really good sort of idea if you just look when we walk past.

Now behind you here, there's a large green space. This is called an inner block park. These are common only in this sort of part of the city, Harlem Park. The origin is originally there were small alley houses back here, and the way that the blocks were designed is that the the largest houses were on the corners and the main streets, sort of the smaller houses were on the side streets and on the interior of the block, there were even smaller houses.

And this allowed for a mixed-income community where you could have doctors and lawyers that might live in the big three-story houses on the corners and, you know, blue-collar working-class people and their families that might live in the smaller houses. But everyone was still part of the same community. Over time, both as tastes changed and as the economic conditions changed and redlining and, you know, flight from the cities and all these contributing factors, the alley houses were some of the first ones to sort of fall into disrepair.

So in the sixties as part of the urban renewal movement, which really was just a lot of slum clearing and demolishing of houses that had fallen into disrepair. But instead of investing in the communities, just sort of demolishing them. So that was a somewhat misguided effort. But one of the the positive things that came from it were these green spaces in these inner block parks. And while they weren't invested in and maintained over the past 50 years— a lot of them have become dumping sites and things like that— they are an asset that the community is working hard to reclaim. And I think we can all, you know, appreciate the value that comes with having an urban townhouse type of living, but also with a green space that you can have access to, you know, nature, a community garden, all those things that sometimes are hard to find in the city.

**00:25:40 - Eric Stephenson:**

So this is one of the things that the Harlem Park community specifically is planning around and trying to build on. And just while we're here, you see this construction fence. This is the back of some new houses. We'll walk around and look at the front of them as well. But this is the Parity Homes Development. They have a mission to revitalize 100 vacant houses in this neighborhood for homeownership.

And they're well on their way with, I think, 25 or more homes pre-sold, and two completed, I think five currently in construction. So a huge movement to get young people like you— I don't know if I can include myself in there anymore— but young people and their families to move back into the community.

Do be careful not to get hit by a bus as they come by... You may have noticed a lot of busses This is a major transit route for the orange line, among others. And recently this state increased the bus frequency sort of as a good faith signal towards the revitalization of the red line that Governor Moore promised this year. So a lot of people remember that project that was, you know, would have been a big step towards repairing some of the damage that was done by the highway. And unfortunately, that didn't happen. But there's still hope.

**00:27:27 - Tiffany Oduro:**

As you can see here on these buildings are red warning signs for the firefighters to not enter this building at all cost do not enter. Why? It's not safe to go into like probably if they went in the floors would like sink on them.

**00:27:54:31 - Eric Stephenson:**

Yeah. So here really what we want to see is the before and after we walk past plenty of vacant houses like this. But these are the first two bright ones that you'll find around here. So it's a really encouraging sign for the community, but it's also an economic proof of concept because for years there hasn't been development in this neighborhood because investors and real estate people said it was impossible, said it was too expensive, said that nobody wanted to live here, said that people don't like big houses anymore. We've heard every single excuse for why these houses couldn't be fixed. And so to finally see it happen in real life is a huge step and hopefully is going to bring more similar revitalization.

**00:29:06:03 - Eric Stephenson:**

So guys, I don't have a whole lot to say here. It's just we just stand here. Because this is what we came to see, right? You can't see it from the outside, but from here, you really can get a sense of the scale and the scope. I mean, when you stand here, come out here, really come out here.

For one, this is just one of my favorite views. It's about like that. This is one of my favorite views. You know, beautiful sunsets to the West. Beautiful view of the city— well, not from this bridge, from other bridges higher up— but, I mean, just imagine between each bridge was an entire city block. Just the scale, the depth. The width. The length. This is one block. So between Franklin and Mulberry, you know, there would have been a stop sign there, a stop sign there, and your typical— it's a whole city block. Yeah.

So for the students, you know, the project site is down there towards the Social Security building. But, you know, to understand the whole context of the. Highway, you really. Have to just take it in like we are right now. Imagine that noise for all the houses that face the highway.



And also this is rush hour. So this is the most that this road ever gets used. Any other time if you come here there's not a lot of traffic.

**00:31:26:28 - Anand Pandian:**

Has anyone tried to blockade it, to like, make a statement about it's uselessness? Has that ever happened? Is that too dangerous to even imagine?

**00:31:35:33 - Eric Stephenson:**

I don't know if that's ever happened, but probably if it did happen, maybe nobody would notice.

**00:31:45:46 - Kristine Roome:**

Was there any type thoroughfare here, like at a smaller scale, before they built the highway? Like a smaller scale?

**00:32:00:20 - Eric Stephenson:**

No. So guys. So imagine the city grid like Franklin Street exists there. Mulberry existing, Franklin existing. This was houses. This was all houses.

That's the question here: What happens to all the dirt that came out of the highway?

**00:32:26:59 - Audience Member:**

It went to the hospital, Harbor Hospital

**00:32:30:39 - Eric Stephenson:**

Harbor Hospital, fill. Now that's the dirt. The bricks and everything like that. All that stuff to this day goes in the landfill. There is no re-use of building materials. All of those beautiful hundred year old face bricks that you can't even get anymore: trash. All of the old growth heart pine lumber, that doesn't exist anymore, that they deforested all of Appalachia for: trash, all of it. All the marble steps: trash. The people got pushed to the Northwest, Park Heights and Randallstown.

**00:33:22:04 - Cristina Murphy:**

Again think of the sense of home—there is no home anymore. They are being kicked out for this right? For this? I'll be very mad. I will protest. I would be very mad.

**00:33:45:31 - Eric Stephenson:**

We're going to cross the street here, and we're going. To check out the Sarah Ann Street houses. And then we'll continue

**00:34:02:42 - Martin French:**

Okay. We're stopping here, Sarah Ann Street. Now, imagine what we're standing on was also once housing. Along Carrollton Avenue, there was also once housing. A lot of it's gone now. The houses you see, there are an example of what we used to call back street houses in Baltimore. When Eric was talking about what happened in Harlem Park, the urban renewal plan basically

said, "We're going to scoop up all of those back street houses and we're going to turn them into inner block park areas. That's what they did. And in terms of what happened economically, it meant that the poorest people in the neighborhood, who lived in the lowest cost housing, ended up getting sorted out from their higher income neighbors and sent somewhere else. Usually it meant a public housing development such as the two that were blown up where we started.

So there was an economic segregation process that was happening on top of whatever else was happening in the city at the time. These houses were supposed to be torn down for various reasons. The Department of Housing Community Development didn't get around to doing it, and Eric can tell you a little bit more about the background of what it took to save these houses as a housing resource.

**00:35:25:32 - Eric Stephenson:**

So these houses represent one of the oldest black communities in Baltimore from the middle 1800s when it was very uncommon for black people to own property, these houses were owned by and lived in by black people. Someone asked about gentrification before, you know, after decades and decades of disinvestment, demolition and disrepair, this neighborhood was basically sold to developers by past city administrations who who also did nothing with the with the space.

But like Martin mentioned, that allowed the opportunity for the community to protest and fight a very long battle against the city and the state in court because the city tried everything in their power to demolish these houses and to erase this history. But the community fought and won, and now these houses are being redeveloped by Black Women Build, a local female, minority owned developer for affordable housing in the future.

**00:36:51:33 - Martin French:**

I'll add one other chapter, or page to that I should say, and that is, in order to make the deal, so to speak, also work financially and to save the houses, they were able to get the City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation to designate the Sarah Ann Street houses as historic landmark property. That was very important to designate them that way because that basically stops any opportunity for future demolition unless there's a public hearing in front of the commission again for the purpose of allowing that demolition to occur.

So the city has finally taken a step to protect these houses for the future. For as long as there's going to be a Baltimore City government, quite frankly.

**00:37:38:02 - Eric Stephenson:**

And for those of you who read the quote on the wall as we were coming in, that's Miss Sonia's house right there. She still lives here. And is the main reason that these houses weren't developed. How are you doing, sir?

**00:37:50:39 - Curtis Eaddy:**

Hey, that's my mom. That's where I live as well.

**00:37:54:45 - Eric Stephenson:**

Do you want to say anything?

**00:38:01:04 - Curtis Eaddy:**

I'd love to share some history. I really don't need it, but I appreciate it. Can you all hear me over there?

So my name is Curtis Eaddy. I am artist, entrepreneur. My mom and I, we've been fighting for our house since 2004. We owned this property here since 1998. We actually— some history that we have currently— So the house has been owned first by a Confederate general. He was owning in this house in the mid 1800s when this neighborhood was just founded by the BNO for workers in the neighborhood.

And then these houses here, it was a three story property just like this one. And all the row alley houses. It was a lot of worker houses, but this house particularly was owned by a black woman. And then she was the first black woman owner as well as a rental property owner because she leased out the rest of these properties to black families.

And this all came post-Civil War. Some things that this neighborhood specifically has been said to have been the first free settlement of slaves from the Carroll Park plantation, which is a little bit of south of here. And those families was able to come and recover, as well as the church behind St Luke's. They was able to help educate some Black families, black kids they was known for as a parish.

**00:39:16:29 - Curtis Eaddy:**

One of the history, this was a part of us making history, saving our property, as the gentleman has said, it's been a long fight. Specifically, one of our residents still lives inside of there. He's trying to save his house from even having to buy it because he already owned part of the property. He didn't own the grounds.

It wasn't a public housing situation for him specifically. And so our family lawyers and community lawyers, the whole department has been able to help out, but now able to still help him preserve the space. He's not the only property that's not been developed directly by Shelly at the moment, but in partnership with. Just seeing that that partnership and the community come together, has been a great, great opportunity because Baltimore, as they've said, has been redlined for years.

There's a lot of history that you can find online. It's on "A Place Called Poppleton." I work with UMBC, so we have been documenting the history in the neighborhood for the past six years, and all of that has helped to preserve the neighborhood. All of that has helped to just really push it into the media because the court was first— the fight was first won in the public's opinion. When the court said "no," that it couldn't happen, when they told us that we had to leave in 2004, residents across the street because they're not impacted by the property development on

this side of the street, a lot of them didn't join the fight because they don't understand how that property was affected.

But there's no— community development, it affects everybody and eminent domain affects everybody, even if you're not the person who's losing your property. So just some things is understanding how eminent domain has been, as my mom said, "It's a violent death"—people lose that. So, right behind you.

These four properties that are still standing, we're working, trying to see if the city can help save these properties instead of tearing them down. The bones are great. Families have been here up until 2021. Two families with just the two and the gentlemen on the corner, Mr. David— he'll talk about it in those stories you'll see on A Place Called Poppleton if you'll google it—His father, he having to leave there. Six weeks later, he passed before he even received the check from the city to relocate himself. But just stress, he said his father lost a lot of weight. He worked for the city many years to own this house, to purchase it. All those houses were owned there weren't running on city property, but the use of eminent domain kind of sped up a person's life to expire.

And just understanding that these human stories go along with the building and why the use of eminent domain and what we fought and still fighting against— changing it to make sure that it's for a good and public use, and private development does not constitute public use, or a good use in the sense that family members are being displaced. So I just wanted to thank you all again, coming to the neighborhood, we're still fighting and there's many things they have going on. And we can raise these houses back instead of

**00:42:14:51 - Curtis Eaddy:**

having big box developments you'll probably see Center\West, right there by Poe Homes. So just juxtaposing the two, the oldest operating public housing unit, Poe Homes and the new box style, not Baltimore facades, not Baltimore cultural heritage and just building density for profit versus even affordable housing. And those things are not really seen in a development scheme.

So the vacant lots the community are hoping to develop, at least they have new partners. They're coming in to try to see if they can help push that notion and that developer, hopefully he can just finish what he started and not move to these other vacant lots. And that's the fight that continues. So more equitable development, more minority developer partners being able to partner come in and that's that's the goal.

So again, I'm Curtis Eady, you can find most of it again A Place Called Poppleton. I mean, it's under UMBC.com, but A Place Called Poppleton, if you google it will pop up.

**00:43:31:08 - Martin French:**

So the bricks that were in the middle were the soft bricks okay the bricks that were on the outside became the really hard bricks. So the hardest bricks were used for facades of

rowhouses. And the soft bricks were used for parting walls and for walls that would not be exposed to the elements. well.

**00:43:54:18 -Eric Stephenson:**

“Somehow!”

**00:43:55:06 - Martin French:**

Soft bricks were cheaper than hard bricks. Right? So if you were a relatively low income Black person, just come off the Carroll Plantation, you can't afford to buy facade bricks, but you can afford to buy soft bricks. So now you've got to protect the soft bricks with paint when you use them as facade bricks. So what you're looking at here is a special little piece of Baltimore history.

The way bricks used to be made, these would have all been hand molded and if you look at the texture of the bricks, sometimes you can even see the way that clay and stuff was packed into the mold before the brick was taken out and put into the kiln. The other thing is, sadly, this is lead based paint because that's all there was in those days.

So one of the issues residents living there face, yeah, one of the issues that people face with old houses everywhere in Baltimore City, almost everywhere, is lead based paint. How do you get rid of it legitimately? And a lot of people say, well, we can't afford to pay for the proper cleanup either. You just let it flake off.

Over the years in the decades, and “yeah it will wind up in Chesapeake Bay, thanks storm sewers— but at least that's not our problem.” I'm not impugning anybody here, but that's what most people do in a situation like that, or they'll try to repaint it for the new paint cover that is not lead based. But Baltimore City was a place that made lead based paint by the way.

00:45:24:40 - 00:45:45:44

Martin French:

Baltimore Lead Works was down by the Inner Harbor Western Shore. And guess what? Its brand name was? Dutch Boy Paint. And if you're old enough to remember Dutch Boy Paint that was named for the Dutch because they invented the process of making lead oxide, which was the white powder— that was the oil to make white lead paint

And then other tints could be added to it. So just take note of that. What this what this signifies here. That's that's entrepreneurship at work and how to get building materials that work without having to pay full price. Okay. And believe me, it wasn't just a black woman who did this type of thing, but a lot of other builders who did the same sort of thing.

**00:46:16:00 - Eric Stephenson:**

Who knows— who can guess why these logs are in the middle of the street?

I guess that's true. I guess maybe that was obvious. But Why? Why block traffic?

Not that— Dumping. Those are community bollards to prevent trash haulers from dumping in the alleys, which is a big problem.

**00:46:56:01 - Eric Stephenson:**

So you may have heard a mention the Center\West development, you can only barely see it over that top of that school there. But that's a block of, you know, modern apartments that were built. And then just beyond that is the Poe Homes, which is a public housing development.

And the point is, this community has long opposed that sort of development in favor of this sort of development. But the community's wishes haven't always been what we're acting on. So hopefully we're entering a new phase where that will no longer be the case.

And I'll also point out the empty pool behind you that is not just empty because it's past Labor Day. It's been that way for several summers.

**00:47:57:45 - Eric Stephenson:**

Talking about juxtaposition and lack of investment— This is a major bus stop. A major bus line, and it doesn't even have a shelter.

I guess we should be happy this one has a bench. But juxtapose that to the subway station that was supposed to go here if the red line had been built. And, you know, that's both a disservice to the folks who live in this neighborhood and also a reason why it's been hard to attract people to the neighborhood, even with the new development for folks who like that kind of thing.

**00:48:44:42 - Audience Member:**

Can you speak to where the red line route was planned?

**00:48:48:47 - Eric Stephenson:**

So the red line would have followed this route. Exactly. I mean, part of it was to take advantage of— So it would have gone from the West Baltimore MARC station, which is at the west end of the highway through downtown and then east. So it would have exactly followed this line.

I think it would have followed this track whether they were elevated or something like those tracks.

**00:49:33:22 - Martin French:**

Just to follow that, if you guys already heard the announcements, of course, thanks to the infrastructure bill nationally, the federal government is preparing to put money back into a red line anyway. Yes, it's too much background noise traffic. You may have heard, of course, that the federal government is through the infrastructure bill offering money to Baltimore City. So the city gets a second chance basically to try to get federal funding to build a red line of some type.

The last iteration, of course, before this, it was a bus way. So it would not have actually had rails because that was determined to be too expensive within the budget of what they were allowed at that time. We don't know yet. The MTA is re-starting the public engagement process and the planning process, however, we expect are going to reuse a lot of the plans they had back in 2014.

**00:50:34:04 - Eric Stephenson:**

This is literally a stoop for house that used to be here. And you know, this road, I mentioned before, this road has always been here, Mulberry Street, but previously it would have been a two way residential street with houses on either side, not the one way highway that you currently have. So you can imagine why the houses here facing the highway didn't last. But as long as these houses have been gone, the city still hasn't fixed the sidewalk.

**00:51:36:33 - Eric Stephenson:**

So for the students here is a great view of your site and what's really kind of hard to see even looking at it is the grading is so weird, because it's completely artificially graded to follow— I mean, you notice the inside goes up to the overpass while the street itself goes down towards MLK to to meet the natural grade.

So when you're standing on MLK, you know, there's 20 feet up, there's a bridge over your head. And so that's the hill that you see going up to meet that artificial grade. so coming in and out of the site, We probably want it to be completely different than it is, and it's going to be once you remove the road. The road serves as like walls that are that are holding up dirt.

So you really have to imagine what it looks like when you remove the highway and you have the natural grade and it sort of reconnects everything. So for those of you who are not doing a project on this, what I would say is just look at all that green space and think about how would you get there if you wanted to it, because you can't without risking your life, your life.

And then the other thing I pointed out about a million times in the crit room the other day, Fremont Avenue is right here and is— it's like a diagonal artery from from West Baltimore down to the harbor— That is interrupted. And, you know, we see all the bridges that reconnected, a lot of the grid streets, but Fremont Avenue was never reconnected by a bridge section.

**00:53:39:56 - Eric Stephenson:**

People are like water They find the shortest path. And so there's a cow trail or a footpath where people on a daily basis do that. Every single day. That's everything.

**00:54:40:58 - Darren Marshalleck:**

My name is Darren Marshalleck. And here is my manifesto or flyer for today. Here in the manifesto, the demographic that I'm focusing on for this project is the displaced, displaced people of Baltimore, or in this area, all the people that were forced out of their homes due to the destruction of this highway and their homes were destroyed, or such as homes we saw earlier that were torn down or abandoned.

And my location of my project will be by the Walgreens where we parked at. That front strip, it will be across and I'm planning a pavilion or multiple pavilions where people such as us can come around and gather and talk about the problem and try to focus on solutions or people could put up posters or flyers even bigger than this, or have events where you have a seating area or maybe providing other resources for homeless people or the displaced.

**00:55:46:59 - Cristina Murphy:**

I know that probably Mr. Martin has multiple things to say, but one of the reasons why I keep on coming back to this highway and of course my students to their projects is because of something that Mr. Martin told me once and it's related to home. And it really struck home to me. And it's a story that he would like to share with you tonight, because I would like you to go home thinking about going home and thinking about other people that have not been able to do the same in the city.

So, Martin?

**00:56:29:13 - Martin French:**

Okay. One of the things, of course, we've tended to focus on as planners is the physical environment. You know, what's going to be built, what's going to be torn down, what's not going to be torn down, what's going to be saved. We don't often think about the human aspect to some of this.

And, basically, when I was a young man in Baltimore, I was a mentor to a student at Harlem Park Middle School, which is up on the north side and was created by urban renewal. And he lived up on Lafayette just off Mount St, which was one of the springs that we came by and crossed over and his name was Ralph. And we talked about a lot of things, of course. He'd come over on a Saturday and you know, we'd work on homework things and talk about various things.

And one of the things that happened to happen when I was living in Charles Village. I was living in a porch-front row house. And the porch had open area underneath that had originally been built as a coal bunker for the coal supply, for the boiler, for the house. The coal had long since disappeared. And in the place of the coal was now an oil tank. So one day, just out of idle curiosity, I don't really remember why I was doing it. I happened to get down on my hands and knees and look under the oil tank and there was a Baltimore City directory from 1917.

A city directory, for those of you are from the electronic age, was the forerunner of a telephone directory. And it was something that listed every resident in Baltimore City by address, you know, alphabetically by last name. And it also showed an occupation for the person if the person reported an occupation. So this is this thing, this 1917 directory was really thick. I mean, probably six inches thick. And I had talked to Ralph and he mentioned a couple of things.



And one of the things that naturally comes into a conversation for a person like me is, well, you know, where are you from? Where are your ancestors from? And he said, well, you know, my my, my grandfather came up from Virginia or North Carolina— he wasn't quite sure which— in 1917, and he got a job as a chauffeur for a banker.

And I said, Well, what was his name? Ralph told me his last name actually was Johnson. Well, of course, Johnson is not a great clue to give somebody, because Johnson's a very common name. So we started looking through the directory page by page until we found a Johnson, chauffeur. And we had an address.

At the time that he came to Baltimore and eventually married and had children, one of a simple fact of life was if you were black, you could not go to a hospital unless it was one of the few charity hospitals that the city ran. Or, if you are on the east side, you go to Johns Hopkins Hospital because hospitals would not admit anybody who was not white.

And this meant that black women gave birth at home because they didn't have the option of going to a hospital to give birth. So one day, you know, year or so later, I again had a spur of the moment thought it was kind of a nice day like this. And I said, you know what Ralph, let's go find that place where your grandfather lives and where your mother was born.

And he agreed. And so we drove out and I can't remember the street. I'm very sorry, but we got there. It was off Monroe Street, I believe, and we parked the car, got out and the street was rowhouses like some of the kinds we just looked at. And the first half nearest us was all demolished. There was a yellow backhoe type device parked in the middle.

It was Saturday, so they weren't working. And they were in the process, the city was in the process of knocking the whole row down and the rest of it was abandoned houses that point. And we walked, you know, both ends of it and realized that the address that he was looking for happened to be the house where they had just stopped for the weekend. So half of the house where his mother was born, was still standing, the other half was gone. And of course. Well, we kind of cried about that. And I kind of shared that sense of grief with him. One of the things that we don't tend to think about is these are places that people could go back to if they're still there.

I was able, my parents were able to take me back to the place where we first lived after I was born. Ralph no longer had the option of taking his children when they came back to where his mother was born. And so I think one thing that everybody needs to keep in mind is when you tear down houses, you tear down a neighborhood, you're not just tearing down the physical buildings and you're not just moving the people who live there to some other place, whether they like it or not. You're also wiping out memories. You're wiping out something that's a part of a family.