

On Fri, Nov 21, 2014 at 12:32 PM, Beth Whitmer <whitmeba@gmail.com> wrote:

November 21, 2014

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Baltimore City Hall
100 Holliday Street, Suite 250
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Mayor Rawlings-Blake:

As an organization that represents residents of South Baltimore, the Federal Hill Neighborhood Association would like to express concern over the exclusion of the Baltimore Beach volleyball courts from the plans for Inner Harbor 2.0. Young professionals flock to the courts seven days a week for eight months of the year, and the exponential growth of Baltimore Beach volleyball has gone hand in hand with the influx of graduates and young families to Baltimore. More broadly, the sand courts are truly a unique attraction for residents and, for many, one of the only parts of the Inner Harbor that makes Baltimore feel like home. Because of this, we think it's so important to make our support for it known.

The sand courts promote a healthy, active lifestyle and showcase a vibrant part of city living for tourists visiting the Inner Harbor. Today, over 2,500 participants each week enjoy Baltimore Beach, and for over a decade the leagues have made Rash Field a well kept, clean space where residents can feel safe well into the late evening. The plans for Inner Harbor 2.0 would replace this area with a park and an underground parking structure. While green space is important to members of our community, we question the sense in locating more of it directly across the street from Federal Hill Park, an iconic place that residents and visitors alike already take advantage of and enjoy. The sand courts offer something special that residents partake in and cherish and redeveloping Rash Field should not be synonymous with eliminating part of what defines the South Baltimore community.

The courts at Rash Field are especially important to the millennials who make up the overwhelming majority of league players each season. In the last decade these residents have arrived to Baltimore City en masse and have become an important part of the fabric of our neighborhoods. These are young professionals who have brought with them higher levels of income and education and are investing in their communities by buying homes and starting families. They are a great success story for urban living and critical to growing the number of families in Baltimore. Baltimore City should aspire to attract these residents and by eliminating the Baltimore Beach volleyball courts, it would be taking away how thousands of young professionals connect to the communities in which they live.

Whatever the ultimate plans for Rash Field may be, on behalf of the residents of our neighborhood we urge that they include the Baltimore Beach volleyball courts. With a footprint of only ten percent of the proposed development site, the sand courts and redevelopment are not mutually exclusive. The growth of Baltimore Beach at Rash Field is something that ought to be invested in, not stifled or taken away. A success story should be treated as exactly that, and our hope is that the City will reflect that sentiment by keeping what makes Rash Field a vibrant, safe place.

Best Regards,

Beth Whitmer
President, on behalf of the Board of Directors, FHNA