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A rendering shows an expanded boathouse and new piers that are part of a plan to improve the Middle Branch. **FIELD OPERATIONS**

Neglected shoreline may get new life

Team seeks feedback as Middle Branch restoration plans take shape in effort to revive area for residents

By Emily Opilo

Take a tour around Baltimore's Middle Branch and, from most vantage points, it's hard to see the possibility.

The South Baltimore waterway has 11 miles of shoreline, but river views are largely obscured. Access, too, is severely limited. Busy roadways, most without sidewalks and safe crossings, starkly divide the waterway from the closest city residents. Debris piles mark the water's edge as trucks roar past on highways.

The ethos surrounding the Middle Branch is not new. For generations, land surrounding the waterway has been viewed as some of Baltimore's least desirable — a historical dumping ground for trash, industrial waste, the city's dead end, even worse, its living.

In the eyes of the Reimagine Middle Branch team, however, the long-neglected shoreline offers enormous potential. This year the public got its first look at a preliminary vision offering water-based recreation, renewed wetlands, waterfront festival space — and a new transportation network to connect residents to the shoreline.

Now planners want feedback from residents who have for decades been largely voiceless in the planning process.

"We're coming back to you again to see if we're getting it right," Ethan Cohen told community members viewing the plan virtually earlier this year. Cohen, who works for Mayor Brandon Scott's office, is among a network of organizers engaged in the project.



Middle Branch Park has 11 miles of shoreline, but much of it is neglected. A new proposal calls for improvements to recreational facilities and access in the area.

KEVIN RICHARDSON/BALTIMORE SUN

A history of negligence and racism

The history of the area surrounding the Middle Branch and its population is one of environmental negligence, shortsighted planning and racism. Geographically isolated and dominated by industry, the area, which wraps around an inlet joining Gwynns

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"It's really important that we break the assumption that positive change in Baltimore can only happen for large development projects."

— Brad Rogers, executive director of the South Baltimore Gateway Partnership

WAR IN UKRAINE

Unbending US support promised by Pelosi

Over 100 civilians leave besieged steel plant in Mariupol

By Vanessa Gera, Nicole Winfield and Lisa Mascaro
Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — A top-level U.S. congressional delegation led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi praised the "ferocity" and resolve of Ukrainians in a face-to-face meeting with their leader in a weekend visit to Kyiv undertaken in extraordinary secrecy.

Pelosi, second in line to the presidency after the vice president, was the most senior American lawmaker to visit Ukraine since Russia's war began more than two months ago. Only days earlier, Russia bombed the Ukrainian capital while the U.N. secretary-general was there.

Pelosi and the half-dozen U.S. lawmakers with her met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his top aides for three hours late Saturday to voice American solidarity with the besieged nation and get a first-hand assessment of the effort as she works to steer a massive new Ukraine aid package through Congress.

"Our commitment is to be there for you until the fight is done," Pelosi is seen telling Zelenskyy in a video of the meeting released by his office. "We are on a frontier of freedom, and your fight is a fight for everyone. Thank you for your fight for freedom."

"You all are welcome," Zelenskyy told the delegation.

Pelosi, D-Calif., told reporters in Poland the delegation was proud to convey to Zelenskyy "the message of unity from the Congress of the United States, a message of appreciation from the American people for his leadership and admiration for the people of Ukraine for their courage."

She is set to meet Polish President Andrzej Duda, a NATO ally, on Monday in Warsaw.

Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo., a U.S. Army veteran, said he came to Ukraine with

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Draft class sets Ravens up for bounce-back year

Heralded set of 11 selections gives team roster composition similar to what it had in record-breaking 2019 season. **Sports**

Orioles wait out rain, beat Red Sox to take series

Jordan Lyles allows just one run in six innings, and offense breaks out for season high in runs in 9-5 win at Camden Yards. **Sports**

Analysis: Federal Title IX data on sports participation is unreliable

Narrowly defined survey seems to account for much of the discrepancy when districts ignore some athletes and overstate others in their tallies

By Kara Newhouse
Capital News Service

As the agency responsible for enforcing Title IX, the U.S. Department of Education collects data that should show whether high schools are providing equal athletic opportunities to girls and boys. Except it doesn't.

Instead, the data the department gathers from school districts ignores some athletes — mostly boys — and often overstates girls' participation in sports.

As a result, 50 years after the passage of Title IX, it's still impossible to tell whether high schools are complying with the law unless someone complains. That burden usually falls to teenage athletes and their

parents, who often aren't aware of their rights under Title IX.

In a number of cases, figures collected by the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights are incomplete and differ substantially from statistics kept by school districts, an analysis by the Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism and Howard Center for Investigative Journalism at the University of Maryland shows.

The discrepancy seems to come largely from the office's narrow definition of sports participation. Officials at several Maryland school districts, for example, said they don't report complete counts of their athletes to the federal government because the survey asks only for a count of athletes on single-

sex teams. Mixed teams — including football teams with one girl — are not included.

In an email response to the Povich and Howard centers' findings, a Department of Education spokesperson said the public should not use its data alone to draw conclusions about Title IX compliance. He also said the department uses its data "in conjunction with other information and factors to investigate and enforce civil rights laws."

Elizabeth Kristen is project director and senior staff attorney at Fair Play for Girls in Sports, a project of Legal Aid at Work that provides legal services to low-income families. She said that in high school Title IX cases she litigated outside Maryland, she'd seen that federal data didn't reflect on-the-ground disparities. But she never knew why.

When told about the Povich and Howard centers' findings, Kristen called the Office

for Civil Rights' exclusion of coed sports bizarre. "They're not getting accurate information to help them enforce Title IX if they're not collecting information about all of the athletic participants," she said.

The office's data comes from a survey that the agency describes as a "long-standing and important aspect" of administering and enforcing civil rights statutes. Under Title IX, schools are required to provide athletic opportunities in numbers that mirror each gender's proportion of enrollment.

The Povich and Howard centers analyzed athletics participation at the 20 Maryland public school districts that provided usable data and found that, in all but four cases, federal data describes a more favorable situation for female athletes than what the districts' own records show.

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Restoration

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Falls and the Patapsco River, was slow to be populated. Instead, it was a favored disposal site — construction debris was dumped in an unlined landfill on Reedbird Island, as was ash from the nearby Reedbird Incinerator, according to Hidden Middle Branch, a study by Maura Roth-Gormley.

From 1872 to 1948, Baltimore buried its dead along the Middle Branch — specifically the poor, unclaimed and unidentified. A potter's field in Cherry Hill, now the site of the fields at Carter G. Woodson School, was the final resting place for bodies, four abreast in trenches. The gravesites was a frequent target of vandals, a 1908 Sun story noted.

The gravesites' poor reputation and the abundance of pollution in the area were cited by the NAACP and the Urban League as they challenged a public housing development for African Americans planned for Cherry Hill in the 1940s, the study notes. Desperately in need of war-era housing but dedicated to racial segregation, city officials approved a Black-only development for the area after white residents repeatedly protested potential sites elsewhere in the city, according to research from the ACLU of Maryland and Sun archives.

"It's not an accident that our communities are cut off from the water," said Brad Rogers, executive director of the South Baltimore Gateway Partnership, which receives a share of casino revenue, invests it in surrounding neighborhoods and is a partner in Reimagine Middle Branch.

"We have spent generations cutting off communities, particularly African American communities, from their water," Rogers said. "We've done that by building highways, siting incinerators and dumps. The work of this is to undo the history of environmental injustice."

'Environmental injustice'

State, local and federal officials have made some efforts to undo damage inflicted to the Middle Branch and its residents. Reedbird Incinerator was demolished in the 1970s and the island dump remediated. A reedy marsh has again grown in the area, although trash remains buried underneath.

A Superfund site in nearby Westport was remediated. Public housing units in Cherry Hill and Westport were shuttered with hopes of reducing overcrowding.

But major obstacles remain. Transportation corridors around the Middle Branch are wide, fast moving and difficult to navigate for pedestrians. Existing amenities like Middle Branch Park are not connected with residential areas. Points to access the water remain limited and uninviting.



A bridge spans across the waters near the Middle Branch. KEVIN RICHARDSON/BALTIMORE SUN

Reimagine Middle Branch's preliminary plan, created by consulting team James Corner Field Operations, revolves around an overhaul of the transportation system around the Middle Branch. The plan calls for transforming the twin Hanover and Potee street bridges over the Patapsco with wider sidewalks, trail space and fishing overlooks.

On land, Hanover Street, East Patapsco Avenue and Pennington Avenue would also become multimodal streets, providing dedicated spaces for pedestrians and cyclists. Main thoroughfares, including Waterview Avenue, would get new sidewalks, crosswalks and bike lanes.

Green gateway to South Baltimore

The Hanover Street Bridge would see its lanes reduced to make it safer for bikes and pedestrians. Traffic at the foot of the bridge would be rerouted to expand Middle Branch Park and create a "green gateway" to South Baltimore.

An extensive trail network would link neighborhoods to waterfront amenities. A new African American Heritage Trail would connect areas like the former potter's field and the former Black Sox stadium in Westport — one of three spots Negro League Baseball was played along the Middle Branch.

Shoreline amenities are also slated for improvements. Middle Branch Park would be expanded and improved. Wetlands would be added to ease flooding concerns, along

with spaces for festivals and smaller gatherings. A hilltop playground would have slides built into the park's hilly landscape. The park's lawn would be regraded to offer better sightlines of downtown Baltimore.

The boathouse west of the park would offer more boat storage, and designers envision a marketplace there with local food vendors. A sandy beach is planned next to the boathouse for boat and canoe access.

Reopening Reedbird Island

Marshlands would be fortified along much of the 11-mile shoreline, including improvements near Brooklyn and Curtis Bay to stave off flooding. Reedbird Island would be opened to the public for the first time.

Restored wetlands would also extend north to Ridgely's Cove, where the Gwynns Falls meets the Middle Branch. Planners hope to build a pedestrian bridge linking Black Sox Park and Swann Park. Ideally, officials hope to connect to a historic swing bridge in the area, creating a destination point for visitors.

Swann Park, currently nestled beneath the suspended junction of interstates 95 and 395, would be redeveloped with a beach and kayak rentals. A boardwalk would stretch north toward Pigtown and Sharp-Leadenhall.

The plan is admittedly lofty — and long term. Reimagine Middle Branch officials say the implementation is a 20-year project.

But some pieces are underway. The new Middle Branch Fitness & Wellness Center is due to open this summer. The design process has begun to upgrade and build trails connecting the center to surrounding

neighborhoods. A wetland project at the mouth of the Patapsco River is also in the design stages.

Funding sources for the broader plan are being worked out, but will likely involve public and private financing. A cost estimator is working on the project, said Megan Born, a senior associate with James Corner Field Operations. A final plan is due to be announced June 4 at a public event in South Baltimore.

Until then, planners will continue to gather input. The preliminary design was the product of numerous community surveys and interviews with area residents.

During a February community meeting, reaction was optimistic. Richard Partlow, a member of the Cherry Hill Community Development Corporation board and who grew up in Cherry Hill, called it "super exciting."

"I think it's a wonderful thing that folks in that community will be able to use that water for recreational activities," he said, recalling a time he was able to swim in the Middle Branch.

Trail network would connect Middle Branch communities

Partlow said he was excited to see the proposed trail system connecting neighborhoods.

"Maybe I'll get a bicycle one day and be able to ride through those communities and see a lot of those parks that I actually didn't know had names," he said.

Malika Brown said she was taken by the "newness" of the plan and seeing "the actual white sand on our side of the border."

Brown said she hopes to see officials follow up on the design with programming.

"What is missing is programs in the communities," she said. "So children can know how to canoe, how to row, know what an oar is."

Residents have been most excited about improved connectivity and environmental restoration, Born said, but they've also been skeptical. Many have questioned whether the plans will come to fruition, she said. Others have been concerned about gentrification and displacement. Those are challenges planners are confronting, she said.

"There's a very understandable and real threat that communities in Baltimore see," she said. "[People ask] 'Is it meant for us?' It's our job to ensure it is for them."

Planners are hoping some of the projects currently underway will help residents feel like the plans are not a fantasy.

"It's really important that we break the assumption that positive change in Baltimore can only happen for large development projects," Rogers said.

Sports

from Page 1

In fact, at about 40% of districts, federal data indicates that when compared with their proportion of enrollment, girls outnumber boys in sports. But schools' own data tells a different story: All districts have fewer opportunities for female athletes.

In the large suburban district of Baltimore County, for example, federal data paints a picture of sports fields teeming with female athletes. The Office for Civil Rights' public website says that, as of the 2017-18 school year, girls constituted 49% of enrollment in the district and 72% of athletes — making girls overrepresented in sports by 23 percentage points.

But the district's in-house athletics data, which the Povich and Howard centers obtained through a public records request, says that girls actually composed 44% of athletes, meaning they were underrepresented in sports by about five percentage points.

That's one of several districts where the office's instructions to count only single-sex sports teams distort the image of proportionality.

In Calvert County, a district spokesperson said its 2017-18 federal data submission did not include football, golf, wrestling, baseball and tennis because those sports were coed. According to district data, that means 616 boys and 54 girls were not counted. Federal data suggests girls are overrepresented in sports by six percentage points, but district data shows they are underrepresented by the same amount.

When presented with the Povich and Howard centers' findings, Title IX advocates said they were puzzled and flummoxed by the federal government's exclusion of coed sports.

Peg Pennepacker, a longtime athletics administrator who now consults with high schools on Title IX compliance, said that's not how she conducts athletics audits. "I'm counting every athlete," she said. "Why wouldn't you?"

A change could be coming. Proposed revisions to the 2021-22 survey would remove

the single-sex distinction from the federal data collection. But the shift would only apply to new data, and those numbers would not be public for a few years.

In the meantime, Terry Fromson, managing attorney for the Philadelphia-based Women's Law Project, said the available federal data isn't fulfilling its purpose. "It isn't making it easier for students or their families to find out if their children are being treated fairly," she said. "And it should."

Schools required to count, but only to count some

Since 2000, the Office for Civil Rights has required K-12 schools to submit data on various programs, including athletics, through the Civil Rights Data Collection. The office describes the biennial data collection as part of its "overall strategy for administering and enforcing" civil rights laws such as Title IX. According to a Department of Education spokesperson, the office "initiated 12 investigations in the last decade based in part on CRDC athletics participation data."

The office also posts the data online, showing the gender breakdown of athletes side by side with enrollment percentages. The most recent data available is from the 2017-18 school year. (The latest data collection was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.)

Title IX advocates said that most students and parents don't know that they can check the office's data tool to see whether their schools are providing proportionate athletic opportunities. If they did, though, the Povich and Howard centers' analysis suggests that, in some cases, the data would not reflect equity gaps they see on their sports fields.

The Office for Civil Rights collects its data directly from schools, yet officials in many Maryland districts said they didn't know why the federal data doesn't match their own data. Those who had an explanation for the discrepancies pointed to the survey's instructions to only count single-sex athletes.

Rob Willoughby, supervisor of instruction and athletics at Caroline County Public Schools, was one of those officials. Last November, he logged into the submission

system to complete the latest survey. As he scrolled, Willoughby had questions of his own.

Like its predecessors since 2004, the 2020-21 Civil Rights Data Collection asked for the number of single-sex interscholastic sports at each school, the number of male and female teams, and the number of female and male participants. The instructions said to "Include only interscholastic athletics in which only males or only females participate."

Willoughby looked at the numbers for football. In the 2020-21 school year, no girls played on Caroline County's teams. But Willoughby had coached football during years when the roster included a girl. He was unsure whether to report the sport as single-sex or coed. "Is it based on who actually participates?" he wondered. "Or the rules of who can participate?"

According to a 2020-21 data tip sheet for schools, when a girl participates on a predominantly male team, such as football or wrestling, the entire team should be excluded from the data. Since that can lead schools to exclude greater numbers of male athletes, it can result in the overall proportion of female athletes appearing higher than is the case.

For instance, if Caroline County's football players were omitted in the last data collection from 2017-18, it would mean that 135 boys — or 15% of the district's athletes — were not counted in the federal data.

Additionally, the exclusion of coed sports can mean that which teams get counted in a given district can change from survey to survey, since girls may participate in traditionally male sports one year and not others. That makes following trend lines difficult, Willoughby said. "It didn't seem to me like they were collecting data to tell a story," he said.

It's difficult to know how school employees who complete the data collection interpret the single-sex athletics definition. Willoughby, who became athletics supervisor last year on top of another supervisory role, said that he tried clicking on a link in the instructions for more information about definitions, but it didn't work. He asked his director for guidance and tried Googling the subject.

Ultimately, he included football in Caroline County's 2020-21 totals since no girls had played that year. But he said it felt like a judgment call, and he didn't know if "the people who sat in this chair before me did it the same way."

Proposed changes in the count

A fuller picture of athletic participation could be coming. In December, the Department of Education shared its proposed revisions for the next data collection, which would eliminate the single-sex athletics questions and ask schools for a tally of all male, female or nonbinary athletes.

It's unclear whether the Office for Civil Rights is aware of how the single-sex definition affected its past data. Documents in the Federal Register say that the proposed changes are intended "to reduce the reporting burden on schools" and lead to more accurate data on all athletes, "regardless of gender identity."

Kristen, the attorney who has litigated high school Title IX cases, said those revisions would be a positive step toward equipping schools and families to advance gender equity in sports. But she lamented that incomplete data has been the norm for so long. "I think what this all signals is just lost opportunity," she said.

Kristen also said the office could do more to educate schools and the public about the data. Pennepacker, the Title IX consultant who focuses on high school sports, agreed. She said the office could take its data "and really turn it into something that could be very useful for schools and parents."

But school leaders might not appreciate a more complete view of high school sports participation being made public, Pennepacker said. "To be quite honest ... I can see it being threatening to some schools, too, because it may expose inequities within their athletics program."

Capital News Service is a student-powered news organization run by the University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism.

CORRECTION | An article in Sunday's editions about the Democratic primary for Maryland governor incorrectly omitted Tom Perez as ranking among the top four candidates cited in a description of internal polling. The Sun regrets the error.

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