

GENERAL DESCRIPTIONCURTIS BAY - FAIRFIELD

The Curtis Bay - Fairfield region is geographically located in the southern part of Baltimore City directly south of Fort McHenry across the Patapsco River. Situated on a large peninsula the region extends into the harbor in a northeasterly direction. It is bounded on the east by the Patapsco River, on the north by the Patapsco River (Harbor Complex) and on the west by the Curtis Bay. This highly developed area extends inland until it reaches the artificial boundaries of Patapsco Avenue and Pennington Avenue (Curtis Avenue) which determines the boundaries between Fairfiled-Curtis Bay and the Brooklyn area. Further, these two avenues create a boundary between the residential development in Brooklyn and the industrial development of Curtis Bay - Fairfield. Specifically, the Curtis Bay region extends southward from Patapsco Avenue and is bordered on the west by Curtis Avenue. Fairfield, on the other hand, includes the area north of Patapsco Avenue to Childs Avenue. Another community, East Brooklyn, lies south of Fairfield and east of Curtis Bay. For the purpose of this report it will be considered as part of Fairfield and referred to as South Fairfield.

The majority of the land in Fairfield-Curtis Bay is used for heavy industrial activity. Prominent industrial activities in the area include chemical manufacturing, petroleum bulk storage, and a variety of steel production.

The extensiveness of the industrial development is exemplified by the (M-3) industrial classification.

Residential development in the region is contained in two segments. The Farfield Community which includes Old Fairfield and Fairfield Homes, and the East Brooklyn community. Old Fairfield and East Brooklyn are classified as low intensity residential neighborhoods while the Fairfield homes are labeled as a medium intensity residential neighborhood.

Commercial activity in the area is relatively moderate and scattered throughout. This commercial activity consists mostly of bars, corner stores, lunch rooms and similar types of activities. In Curtis Bay most commercial development is situated along Curtis Avenue and in Fairfield along Patapsco Avenue.

Some fairly large tracts of vacant land (open space) exist in the area. However, part of the land that is classified as open space is used as train storage yards. A large tract of open space land is located in the northern part of the peninsula lying geographically between the Harbor Tunnel Thruway and the shoreline. This tract of land called Masonville may be considered as Brooklyn and part may be considered as Fairfield. The majority of this land is vacant and some is classified as forested.

Two wetland regions are located in the area. One is located at Curtis Creek and the other at the Patapsco River inlet to the harbor (Reed Bird Island). These wetlands are not extensive and their productivity is questionable. In general, however, the peninsula can be considered to be highly developed with only a small portion of the natural environment remaining.

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The neck of land defined by the Patapsco River and Curtis Creek, situated on the south side of Baltimore Harbor, is an area of water-oriented heavy industry and two residential communities, one black, Fairfield, and the other white, East Brooklyn. Up to the mid 19th century, the area was largely rural, and it was not until the post-Civil War expansion that the residential communities took root.

The area was originally patented by John Cromwell of Anne Arundel County in the late 17th century, and it is from his descendants that the name Fairfield originates, named after the English home of one of his grandson's wife. The present residential community dates from 1880's, as employees of the nearby industry established their homes there amid the bountiful farmland. At that time 2100 men were employed by nine factories in the area-companies such as the Raison Chemical Company, the Baltimore Chrome Works, and the Monumental Acid Works. According to the Fairfield Journal, the population was: "Adult Males, 62; Adult Females, 46; under 21, 111; total 221." (Sun, June 21, 1941). At this time the area was still rural enough to be popular as a picnic area for Baltimoreans. Access to the city was via a "nickel bridge" across the Patapsco, and a ferry to Locust Point.

Not until World War II did the tank farms for which the area is famous begin to appear. The 1941-42 expansions of Maryland Dry-docks and the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard brought thousands of wartime workers into the area. Emergency housing, built by the government, was intended to be turned into low income "slum clearance" housing after the war (Sun, August 10, 1941). This land, although industrially zoned, was deliberately developed as residential land by the city, and has obstinately remained so.

East Brooklyn, the community south of Fairfield, at the end of Fairfield Road, can be dated more precisely. A six block area of row homes, it was built in the late 1890's as housing for workers in Martin Wagner's cannery plant. Wagner's Point, named for Martin Wagner, was the site he chose for his plant when he moved it out of Baltimore City in 1896.

East Brooklyn is now literally surrounded by tank farms, and these began to appear not long after the community was established. In 1906, Ellis Oil Company established an oil storage complex nearby, which today is owned by Atlantic-Richfield. Several serious explosions, one in 1940, others in 1960 and 1965, have failed to cause the abandonment of East Brooklyn by its residents, who seem to enjoy the isolation the area provides.

When Baltimore annexed this area in 1918, one of the promises was that the area would receive better planning, street cleaning, and health facilities, but these promises were slow to be fulfilled. The City's interests, clearly industrial rather than residential development, hindered any improvements to the communities. As late as 1965, HCD proposed that the areas slowly be "phased out", but they tenaciously held on, although it is the industry rather

than the neighborhoods that hold the upper hand, both politically and economically.

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