

from REZONING FAIRFIELD

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In 1931 the city of Baltimore passed its first zoning ordinance. Since that time Fairfield has been zoned industrially and it has suffered from it. It is time now that the city correct this mistake by zoning Fairfield residential in keeping with the residential character of the neighborhood.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Fairfield is now and always has been residential in character. It first grew up in the late 1880's as employees of nearby industry established their homes there amid the farmland. At that time 2100 men were employed in nine factories in the area--companies such as the Rasin Chemical Co., 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, males 51, females 60; total 221." (The Sun, June 26, 1941) On Sundays people came in their horse-drawn carriages to this rural area to enjoy the woods, the fields, and the shorelands along the bay. It was not until 1918, when the city last expanded its boundaries, that Fairfield became a part of Baltimore. Ironically, one of the arguments for expansion made then by Mayor Preston was that the area would receive better planning, street cleaning, health and sewage disposal facilities.

Between the two world wars the tank farms for which the general area is known first began to appear. In 1941-'42 expansion of the Maryland Drydock Company and Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard brought thousands of shipyard workers and their families to the Fairfield-Curtis Bay area.

It was in response to the critical housing shortage produced by this war-time industrial expansion that the Fairfield Homes were built in 1942 on property obtained from the B. and O. Railroad Co.. Although they were to be used temporarily as housing for shipyard workers, the intention was that they become low-income housing after the war.

"When the emergency* is ended three Government-owned housing developments for families of defense workers at Fairfield shipbuilding industries are to be used as low-rental houses for slum dwellers... Accordingly, the three projects to provide a total of 1000 housing units in Brooklyn, Fairfield and Westport, in layout design and construction are 'to follow very generally the pattern of slum-clearance projects' in Baltimore." (The Sun, August 10, 1941)

This residential use of industrially zoned land was deliberately undertaken by the city of Baltimore, and it was intended at the time that it be a permanent change in use. The city had attempted for several years without success to place such a project in the area due to strong public opposition. Now they had their chance.

"Asked for detailed information on the character of construction, the Housing Authority spokesman said: 'We are trying to design them so that construction costs may be held down and still permit erection of brick. That would insure long life.'" (The Sun, August 10, 1941)

*The War had not yet started.

Thus it is a misconception that the Fairfield Homes are merely "left-over" World War Two housing that remains standing unintentionally and by accident. This was not true thirty years ago, and it is not true today. Spokesmen from the Department of Housing and Community Development maintain that there are currently no plans to phase out the project.

After the war employment in the area decreased again. Industry grew little, in spite of the strong impetus that the war years had given. Industrial growth occurred in other parts of Baltimore instead. Old Fairfield was left alone once again. As of now, almost two generations have passed since Fairfield was zoned industrial, and the neighborhood remains obstinately residential.

Meanwhile, construction of the Fairfield Homes had re-inforced the neighborhood's residential character. In the 1950's Victory Elementary School (school 238) was built to serve the children of Fairfield, an official concession to reality. This was a grudging and ambiguous move, however, since the building was specifically designed for easy conversion to warehouse use. Nevertheless, the school helped strengthen the long-range stability of the community, just as one would predict. In the 1960's an addition was made to the school, this time much of it designed for conversion to office space. Clearly the City was undecided about its intentions for the future of Fairfield, maintaining the industrial zoning yet reluctantly providing some residential services.

On December 23, 1965, a nine-alarm fire at the Continental Oil Company in nearby Wagner's Point "injured 32 persons and disgorged a mushroom cloud visible all over Baltimore..." (The Evening Sun, Feb. 11, 1966). Thereafter, Housing and Community Development proposed that both Fairfield and Wagner's Point be "phased out." But nothing much happened.

In 1970 the city revived a promise first made in 1941 to provide Old Fairfield with sewers.

"In fact, 'according to the present schedule' the city plans to extend a \$512,000 sewerage link-up to Fairfield 'beginning within the next several months,' the principal engineer for the Division of Waste Water [Robert B. Lyon] said yesterday." (The Sun, Oct. 19, 1970)

They have yet to make good on this promise, and Fairfield residents are justifiably skeptical. For one thing, it makes no sense from a professional planning point of view to install residential sewers--or any residential capital improvements--in an industrially zoned area. For another, the city concurrently revived the specter of a "phasing out" of Fairfield. In 1971 Old Fairfield was actually included in the Capital Improvements Program as an industrial renewal project--at the same time that the Department of Public Works was promising to install (sooner or later) residential sewers! In the fall of 1971 the Fairfield Renewal Project was then removed from the C.I.P. when it was found to be ineligible for federal assistance and prohibitively expensive to the city as a result.

The history of the city's actions in Fairfield is thus one of contradictions and indecision, based on the inappropriate action of giving an industrial zoning classification to a residential neighborhood. Naturally, the neighborhood has suffered immensely as a result. The M-3 zoning has prevented, is preventing, and will continue to prevent the community from receiving the urban services every residential neighborhood is entitled to. Because of the M-3 zoning, most of Old Fairfield has been left without sewers, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, storm drainage, or adequate street paving and maintenance. Children swim in the water-filled streets after summer rainstorms. People are forced to build their own sidewalks in order to pass from the street to their door. And although H.C.D. intends to keep Fairfield Homes in operation, they seem unwilling to provide them with adequate services either. The facility is badly in need of extensive modernization (e.g. to fixtures, plumbing, wiring, etc.) similar to that given to the other city housing projects during the last decade. H.C.D. admits to this need and claims a desire to undertake modernization, but so far no money has been appropriated nor is any foreseen.

Now let us examine Fairfield as it is now, to see why it still ought to be given residential zoning.

POPULATION

Fairfield has a total population of 1445 residents, 1157 living in Fairfield Homes and 288 in Old Fairfield, according to the 1970 Census. This population is 99.5% black. Old Fairfield experienced a decrease in population of about 20% between 1960 and 1970.

LAND USE

A land use survey of Fairfield shows that the area proposed for R-5 zoning is overwhelmingly residential in use. The only industrial use within the community is a small trucking firm on Tate Street, the Maryland Transfer Company. There are also some small "ma and pa" groceries, some taverns, a laundromat, and several churches.

HOUSING

The 1970 Census found a total of 110 housing units in Old Fairfield, 56 of them occupied. A 1971 survey by the Neighborhood Design Center found 102 units in Old Fairfield. It should be mentioned that census data is reliable only within certain limits, due to difficulties in collection and changes over time. While keeping this limitation in mind, census data will be used throughout this report for comparison purposes.