

urbanite

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October 2011

Vol. 7, No. 89

Follow the Red Line

Urbanite Project 2011: Open City Challengeby [Rebecca Messner](#)

Urbanite Project 2011: Open City Challenge was a call to action for innovative thinkers to transform Baltimore via one of the most controversial public works projects in the city's history. Developed through a collaboration among *Urbanite*, Maryland Institute College of Art, D center Baltimore, the Maryland Transit Administration, and the Baltimore City Department of Transportation, this year's Urbanite Project, which we launched in March, hinges on the concept of an open city: a city where citizens feel connected to one another, have access to services and amenities, and can easily move around.

The challenge surrounded the construction of the Red Line—the proposed 14-mile, light-rail line that will connect Security Square to the West, the Inner Harbor, and the Johns Hopkins University Bayview campus on the city's east side—which has the potential to make Baltimore a more open city. Costing an estimated \$1.8 billion, with construction lasting up to five years, it's being called the biggest infrastructure project ever undertaken in the state of Maryland. With Urbanite Project 2011: Open City Challenge, we asked: How can we turn this arduous construction process into something positive for the city of Baltimore?

Contestants were asked to address a list of concerns, from increased noise during construction to ways to safely re-route traffic and how the MTA can share real-time information updates with Baltimore residents. Above all, contestants had to transform these problems into opportunities for change.

We received proposals from all over the world: Italy, South Korea, Israel, England, and both coasts of the U.S. The entries, in the form of 24-by-30-inch, foam-core boards, were displayed anonymously in the inaugural exhibition at the new D center @ MAP gallery this summer. The ideas were as varied as the contestants: a mix of professional architects, designers, art students, and interested, creative city-dwellers.

An accomplished panel of urban design and transportation experts studied a pool of entries, narrowed down by public voting. They chose six finalists, and, among them, a winner. Entries were judged blindly, with no regard to professional background or location. Jurors were looking for ideas that focused on engaging the community, fostering an environment of openness and accessibility for Baltimore citizens and visitors. They gave preference to the big ideas—ideas that were innovative, provocative, unconventional—and to those entries that were interdisciplinary, combining approaches from a range of fields.

In the following pages, we present the finalists of Urbanite Project 2011: Open City Challenge. The winner, who will receive a portion of \$10,000 in total prize money and the possibility of collaborating with city officials to implement their ideas, will be announced at a special event in October. For details, call 410-243-2050.

This Way Up

Empowering Baltimore's youth to shape a future direction by BLOC

“This Way Up” endeavors to empower area youth to “build up” the community surrounding their Red Line station, in both senses of the term.

Objective: To work with local youth to design and construct a multi-phase gateway installation around the West Baltimore MARC Red Line station that enables neighboring residents to showcase their community assets and shape the development of a future use for the station’s construction site. The project’s ultimate goal is to empower area youth to “build up” the community surrounding the Red Line station in both senses of the term.

During Phase One, youth will learn how to design, build, and then install signs at the edges of the station’s construction site. These signs will be replaceable (handmade signs that can be planted and replanted) or updatable (signs with plastic display cases behind which drawings, posters, and announcements can be exhibited). Depending on what the youth want to highlight, they will:

- (a) Inform passersby about community features like parks, schools, and historic sites; and
- (b) Educate community members about different aspects of the ongoing construction process; and
- (c) Display proposals for future community uses of the station’s construction staging area.

As part of this phase, local partners have agreed to help the youth engage the community, through meetings and other forms of outreach, to learn what community strengths should be visually featured and what types of post-construction uses should be considered. Through this collaborative process, they will learn community leadership skills. We expect Phase One to last for the duration of the construction.

During Phase Two, youth will be trained to convert the construction staging area, now an empty lot, into the community use that has garnered the most positive feedback based on the proposals they displayed. This could be anything from an art installation to a memorial garden or vegetable garden to a recreational venue to a plaza with more permanent informational kiosks. Some of the signs created for Phase One will remain—namely, those showcasing community features. Some of them will be replaced to make way for signs related to the new community use (e.g., signs posting open hours or events taking place at the site). We expect Phase Two to take 3 to 5 months.

PROJECTED COSTS:

Labor: Donated

Design Training: Donated

Construction Training: Donated

Leadership Training: Donated

Installation Equipment: Donated

Materials: \$5-6,000

*Baltimore Lawyers and Organizers Committee (BLOC) is a study/reading group with the confluence of community organizing and lawyering as its theme. BLOC is made up of Brett Felter, Ingrid Löfgren, Nora Mahlberg, Stephen Ruckman, and **Christina Schoppert**.*

Christina Schoppert is a founder of BLOC, and Staff Attorney at Community Law Center.