BLUEPRINT FOR HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS

A PATH TO VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND AFFORDABLE HOMES
Executive Summary

Baltimore is a proud city of neighborhoods. And yet, too many of these neighborhoods have been hollowed by the ravages of job loss and population loss, crime and gang violence, drug addiction and disease. Our neighborhoods are a reflection of the entrenched disparities that continue to plague the city. And our neighborhoods been left behind by a city government that has been unable to develop the investments and policies to promote the renewal and growth we deserve. A city of neighborhoods deserves a comprehensive policy to grow and heal our neighborhoods. This is Elizabeth Embry’s blueprint to do just that.

To turn vacant housing into new homes, Elizabeth will:

- Strengthen the Vacants for Value program.
- Restore the dollar house program.
- Deploy legal tools to place abandoned homes in new homeowners’ hands.

To give every resident a home they can afford, Elizabeth will:

- Strengthen incentives for the construction of affordable housing.
- Support the Thompson housing mobility program.
- Root out housing discrimination.
- Commit to the rehabilitation of appalling public housing.
- Invest in specialized, wraparound services for the homeless.
- Reform rent court.
- Address mismanagement of the Housing Authority.

To empower and strengthen our neighborhoods, Elizabeth will:

- Expand the use of community land trusts.
- Grow the Healthy Neighborhoods program.
- Deepen relationships with stakeholders focused on neighborhoods.
- Execute on Project C.O.R.E. in partnership with communities.
- Press for school-centric neighborhood development.
- Advance smart zoning, tax incentive and property tax reforms and maximize resident use of tax credits.

To improve the health of our homes and communities, Elizabeth will:

- End the scourge of lead poisoning in Baltimore
• Improve quality standards and health programs for asthma.
• Employ proven strategies to reduce childhood obesity and increase access to healthy, affordable food.
• Expand access to health care across the city, with a focus on prevention- and population-based strategies.
• Work to address health issues affecting our city’s youth.
• Combat the spread of communicable diseases.
• Fight to end the drug addiction epidemic in the city.
• Expand care for those experiencing mental illness.
• Develop public health goals that include and reflect the voice of the city.
Introduction

Baltimore is famously a city of neighborhoods, each with its own proud history and personality. Our neighborhoods are the beating heart of the city, the source of its character, energy and charm.

But so many of our neighborhoods also need assistance.

They have been hollowed, in too many cases, by the ravages of job loss and population loss, crime and gang violence, drug addiction and disease. And the vacant homes that plague so many of our neighborhoods are an alarming embodiment of entrenched cycles of poverty. And in fact, these vacant homes are not only a symptom but a cause of urban blight, leading to depressed home values and increased criminal activity. According to one report, vacants have only continued to spread across the city, growing by 500 homes despite targeted interventions in recent years.

Our neighborhoods are a reflection of the enormous disparities that continue to haunt the city. According to one analysis, a comparison of areas of minority concentration in 1960 and 2000 looks nearly identical – neighborhoods in the west and east part of the city with 90 to 100 percent African-American populations, and neighborhoods in the rest of town with 0 to 50 percent. The life expectancy of a child in Upton/Druid Heights is more than 20 years shorter than in Roland Park. One recent report by the Urban Institute found that Baltimore has one of the highest levels of inequality across neighborhoods of any large city in the nation.

And our neighborhoods have too frequently been left behind by a city government that has been unable to develop the investments and policies to promote the growth and renewal we deserve.

A city of neighborhoods deserves a comprehensive policy for neighborhoods: A policy that turns vacant houses into thriving homes. A policy that addresses the endemic lack of affordable housing in the city, and helps the tens of thousands of citizens in our town who cannot find a place to live, or are forced to live in substandard conditions. One that helps to rebuild the communities through smart investments and policies. One that seeks to address the health problems that corrode our neighborhoods and harm our families.

In the pages that follow, you will find my blueprint to regrow our neighborhoods.

This is the final in a series of blueprints that I have been releasing to set out how I would address the problems of our city. The others were on topics ranging from fighting crime, to
education, to job growth, and transportation, to name only a few. We will not be able to rebuild our neighborhoods unless we are able to grow jobs and teach the next generation the skills they need for the emerging industries, or provide schools to form the heart of those neighborhoods, or overcome barriers through an effective transportation system.

I invite you to read these blueprints on my website at www.embryforbaltimore.org and email me your ideas and reactions at Elizabeth@embryforbaltimore.org. Because it is only by working together that we will be able to renew the legacy and promise of our proud neighborhoods.
**Turn Vacant Housing into New Homes**

Although estimates vary, the U.S. Census Bureau has found 46,800 vacant properties in the city – a full 16 percent of Baltimore’s housing stock. And the percentage is significantly higher in neighborhoods such as Sandtown-Winchester. Vacant homes are magnets for crime and gang activity, reduce property value, and are a financial burden on the city, requiring additional police and fire protection. Studies show that blocks with vacant buildings had more than three times as many drug calls to police and twice as many violent calls as blocks without vacant buildings, and houses within 150 feet of a vacant or abandoned property experience a net loss in value of more than $7,500. Vacant houses corrode neighborhoods and are among the most profound manifestations of urban decay and blight in our city.

As Mayor, Elizabeth will press forward with an aggressive strategy to address the problem of vacants in our city. She will:

- **Strengthen the Vacants to Value program.** This program, which focuses on a targeted approach to razing and redeveloping vacants in the most promising, mid-market neighborhoods, has shown real promise and success in neighborhoods such as Oliver and Reservoir Hill. But, its impact has been limited by an absence of financing for individual homeowners and its confinement to certain select neighborhoods. Indeed, according to one recent report, Baltimore’s vacant building stock only continued to grow during the program’s first four years. As Mayor, Elizabeth will seek to strengthen this program, including by expanding access to capital, increasing the size of the program booster grant, aggregating properties into larger development parcels, and following up to ensure the house is rehabbed and occupied.

- ** Restore the dollar house program.** Even a strengthened Vacants for Value program does not address many of the vacant homes that are in the most blighted neighborhoods. We also need smart and targeted strategies that create incentives for the remainder of the homes. Several decades ago, the city launched a program to offer vacant houses for sale for a single dollar, on the condition that the purchasers live in the houses and make them livable. One important feature of the program was the painstaking guidance provided by city officials as they walked potential homeowners through the process and ensured they were able to support their new homes. The program helped to revive long abandoned Baltimore neighborhoods such as Barre Circle and Otterbein. As Mayor, Elizabeth will restore the program in areas where the Vacants for Value program does not apply. Also, when the dollar house program was originally in effect, it was supplemented with low interest loans to allow owners to rehabilitate the property – not only did no one default on the loans, but the city made money on the interest from the loans, and from the additional property taxes. As
Mayor, Elizabeth will pair the restored program with a robust set of rehabilitation loans to repair the newly acquired houses.

- **Deploy legal tools to place abandoned homes into new homeowners’ hands.**
  Over the last several years, the city has expanded its use of the receivership program, which takes vacant homes, assigns them to a receiver, which then auctions them back into private hands. In 2010, the city filed less than 100 such cases per year. By 2014, the city had filed 1,876. But, it still takes one to three years from the time the city sues an owner to the time a house is renovated and occupied. As Mayor, Elizabeth will dedicate more resources to receivership cases, and review carefully the effect that recent legal changes have had on the streamlining of the receivership process, to determine if more expansions are needed.
Give Every Resident a Home They Can Afford

But the housing problem in Baltimore is about far more than vacant houses. More than 16,000 households in the city are on the waiting list for affordable housing, and Baltimore has 29 affordable units for every 100 extremely low-income households. Over half of renters in Baltimore spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent, making Baltimore the second most unaffordable area in the nation for renters. About 3,000 people are homeless on any given night in Baltimore, and more than 30,000 Baltimore residents experience homelessness over the course of the year. In the words of Robert Strupp, the executive director of Baltimore Neighborhoods, far too many people in Baltimore “struggle to find affordable housing, live in barely habitable sub-standard housing or have no place at all to call home.” This is simply unacceptable.

As Mayor, Elizabeth will launch a comprehensive approach to housing affordability, one that includes the following elements:

- **Strengthen incentives for the construction of affordable housing.** One of the most challenging problems in housing affordability is encouraging the construction and availability of affordable housing units. As Mayor, Elizabeth will float revenue bonds guaranteed by foundations to obtain a lower interest rate for developers to build affordable housing, provide direct loans to low-income homeowners for home purchases and rehabilitation of houses, and offer additional property tax relief to persons building new affordable housing projects to support lower rents.

- **Support the Thompson mobility program.** Far too many people in Baltimore are ensnared in neighborhoods with cycles of poverty. But we are also the home to one of the leading housing mobility programs in the country, where vouchers are provided to individuals who wish to move to housing in opportunity neighborhoods, including in surrounding areas, and they are provided a range of services and supports to help their transition. As Mayor, Elizabeth will ensure that services are fully provided to participants, and work with neighboring areas to remove barriers to the resettlement of voucher holders and guarantee the availability of affordable housings, including through city financial contributions.

- **Root out housing discrimination.** More than a century of overt and covert housing discrimination is at the core of so much of the poverty and blight that now plagues the city. We must root out that discrimination, wherever it may be. As Mayor, Elizabeth will fully enforce city efforts to identify and redress housing discrimination, and work with the Obama
administration to implement its new fair housing policy rules in a robust manner to end the scourge of discriminatory housing once and for all.

- **Commit to the rehabilitation of appalling public housing.** The condition of public housing in the city is deplorable. According to a Baltimore Sun investigation, thousands of residents have waited more than a month for repairs. Sometimes, they have waited more than a year. Last year, the city needed to evacuate elderly and disabled tenants from public housing in Reservoir Hill who had gone four days without water and with only occasional heat. The lights have been out in one public housing building for months. In others, the building is so cold that residents need to use their ovens to stay warm. This is unacceptable and dangerous. As Mayor, Elizabeth will expand the Rental Assistance Demonstration program, which provides essential funds for repairs, and fill vacant repair positions with trained workers.

- **Invest in specialized, wraparound services for the homeless.** Homelessness is partly a problem of affordable housing, but it is also a problem about public health, and mental illness, and emergency services, and workforce development. As Deputy State’s Attorney, Elizabeth substantially increased the availability and efficacy of specialized programs for vulnerable populations, and as Mayor, she will build on that record to ensure that we are invested in wraparound services for the homeless across the city. Drawing from the experience of cities like Denver and Santa Clara, she will explore innovative financial approaches to the problem of homelessness, including social impact bonds. She will commit to outreach to the homeless community to connect them to Medicaid, and support the provision of care in supportive housing. And she will ensure that homeless service providers are working with schools and hospitals to provide a seamless web of support for the homeless.

- **Reform rent court.** Eighty years ago, Baltimore was a national leader in creating a rent court to ensure fairness in the rental housing system for all parties. And yet, independent observers now describe justice in the court as a “charade”, with incomprehensible processes, no transparency, and rules that promote unnecessary litigation. As Mayor, Elizabeth will launch a commission to recommend reforms to the policies, procedures and staffing of the city’s rent court.

- **Address mismanagement of the Housing Authority.** From a sex-for-repairs scandal to the elimination of the Inspector General, to deplorable conditions in public housing, to the results of a highly critical audit, the Authority has shown a lack of urgency, leadership and oversight. It is time for a new approach. As Mayor, Elizabeth will provide new leadership to the Housing Authority, appoint a strong Board of Commissioners independent of the Housing Commissioner, undertake a public audit to determine how much money is available
in reserves, restore the inspector general position, and use Citistat to evaluate success, monitor repair stats, and find areas for improvement.
Empower and Strengthen Our Neighborhoods

The story now is well-known: In the 1990s, 130 million dollars is invested in the development of Sandtown-Winchester. Twenty years later, the neighborhood is one of the poorest areas in Baltimore, and the epicenter of the Freddie Gray tragedy and the unrest that followed. The development of stronger neighborhoods is obviously a complex problem, one that sits at the heart of every pillar of this blueprint, and every other blueprint Elizabeth has released, in areas ranging from criminal justice to job growth to transportation. In addition, we need to open ourselves to new approaches to neighborhood development, including ones that have seen success in other cities. The principle here is that we need to embrace strategies that give the residents a voice in the future of their neighborhoods, and empower them to grow those neighborhoods from within. As Mayor, Elizabeth will seek to do just that. She will:

- **Expand the use of community land trusts.** As Mayor, Elizabeth will support and invest in community land trusts, which empower local nonprofits to take control of vacant buildings and empty land, develop the property, and then retain a stake for the long term benefit of the neighborhood through a joint ownership structure. These trusts empower neighborhoods to determine and shape the use of their land, and although they are still relatively rare in Baltimore, they have shown real promise in other cities such as Boston.

- **Grow the Healthy Neighborhoods program.** Healthy Neighborhoods is a public-private partnership that seeks to strengthen certain neighborhoods by providing below market loans, matching grants and other forms of support for certain middle neighborhoods in the city. As Mayor, Elizabeth will support the Healthy Neighborhoods program, including by seeking to grow the capital pool and expand the neighborhoods participating in the program.

- **Deepen relationships with stakeholders focused on neighborhoods.** Perhaps more than ever, there are institutions inside and outside our city that want to help Baltimore’s neighborhoods succeed. But they require an active partner in City Hall. As Mayor, Elizabeth will take steps to deepen the city’s relationship and partnerships with stakeholders such as its anchor institutions (who are increasingly active in driving economic development in Baltimore) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (which has now funded $30 million Choice Neighborhood implementation grants in 17 major cities across the nation, without Baltimore receiving one).

- **Execute on Project C.O.R.E. in partnership with communities.** Project C.O.R.E. is a multi-year, joint city-state partnership to address blight in Baltimore. The program could have a profound impact on the future of the city, but we know all too well from past
redevelopment efforts, the challenge is very much in the execution. For one, it will be essential that Governor Hogan is pressed to make good on these commitments. Then, Baltimore communities must play an active role in the strategic planning to reshape neighborhoods, and that Baltimore workers are provided an opportunity to play a role in the demolition and related work that follows, including through the Humanim deconstruction program.

- **Press for school-centric neighborhood revitalization.** Across America, other cities, community developers are recognizing the importance of placing schools at the heart of economic and neighborhood revitalization efforts. And yet, even as the community schools model has found traction in Baltimore, in other ways the effort to improve schools is still held apart from broader work in the neighborhood. In the coming decade, about one billion dollars will be invested to build new or renovated schools in neighborhoods across the city as part of the 21st Century School Buildings Plan. And yet, there is too little work being done to connect this initiative strategically with revitalization of the neighborhoods around them. By bringing together city agencies, community leaders, business leaders, organizations, foundations and anchor institutions, Elizabeth will work towards holistic solutions that steer public and private investment into the city’s hardest hit neighborhoods.

- **Advance smart zoning, tax incentive and property tax reforms and maximize resident use of tax credits.** The approach the city takes in the coming years in zoning, TIFs and PILOTs, and taxes will have a profound effect on the trajectory of the city’s neighborhoods and homes. Elizabeth set out detailed reform packages in in her Blueprint for Job Growth and her Blueprint for Transportation, where she described how she would (i) ease the tax burden on all of Baltimore, reducing taxes each year to complete the current 20 cent commitment, and commit to a schedule for further tax deductions; (ii) implement a five-part plan to use and improve TIFs and PILOTs, (iii) enact into law zoning reforms for a modern city, and (iv) work with area groups to ensure that citizens of the city access the existing tax benefits that are rightly theirs. Rather than repeat those policies here, she invites the reader to review them at embryforbaltimore.org.
Improve the Health of our Homes and Communities

More than 85 percent of a person’s health is determined by events that take place outside of a hospital or clinic. It is unacceptable that there is as much as a 20-year difference in life expectancy between neighborhoods in Baltimore. Where you are born should not determine your health – that is not fair to the people of Baltimore, especially the children, who have the right to grow up in a safe, healthy environment. This city has historically made incredible strides in improving the health of its citizens through data-driven, targeted public health interventions, but there is a great deal more that we must do. As Mayor, Elizabeth will listen to the needs of communities, draw on cutting edge research and best practices, and partner with the city’s world class medical and education systems and organizations to develop healthy homes, and healthy neighborhoods. She will:

- **End the scourge of lead poisoning in Baltimore.** Lead poisoning has been shown to increase learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and behavioral disorders – lead poisoned children are six times as likely to drop out of high school. A 2013 report by the Maryland Department for the Environment noted that 65,000 children in Baltimore had dangerously high levels of lead in their blood from 1993 to 2013. Although there has been a decline in lead poisoning in recent years, far too many cases continue to cluster in neighborhoods such as Sandtown-Winchester, and according to a recent Baltimore Sun investigation, our system to protect against poisoning continues to suffer from a number of flaws.

  Studies show that every dollar invested in abatement returns savings many times over in avoided costs associated with exposure, and this is money that can be reinvested in the city. As Mayor, Elizabeth will fight to end the scourge of lead poisoning in Baltimore — she will grow lead hazard reduction grant funding; boost enforcement of city lead violations and increase the number of inspectors; increase blood lead testing rates; and increase outreach and education efforts; and explore the use of social impact bonds and similar financial mechanisms to subsidize abatement efforts.

- **Improve quality standards and health programs for asthma.** Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism, and the leading reason that children go to emergency rooms. As many as 20 percent of children in Baltimore City have asthma, more than double the national average, and it disproportionately affects those living in poverty. As Mayor, Elizabeth will increase funding for in-home education and housing interventions; improve inspection standards and practices to include healthy measures to reduce asthma triggers and improve indoor air quality; and use telemedicine to coordinate asthma treatment for children across schools.
Employ proven strategies to reduce childhood obesity and increase access to healthy, affordable food. One in three youth in our city is either obese or overweight, and obesity is connected to a number of serious health problems, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. Less than one in five kids eats the necessary amount of fruits and vegetables, and one in four residents live in a food desert, or an area with limited access to healthy foods, including 34 percent of African Americans. This is absolutely unacceptable as our city looks forward to a brighter, healthier future. We have an obligation to our children to do more to curb the culprits of the obesity problem like sugary drinks and provide nutritious, local, and affordable alternatives that can promote better health outcomes for our city.

As Mayor, Elizabeth will expand incentives for grocers that locate in food deserts and purchase local foods, develop new programs to bridge food deserts, including food delivery and car sharing; support efforts to grow the local food economy, including the Baltimore Food Hub; work to place warning labels on sugary drinks; and engage with communities on how we can increase education on and access to better choices. In addition to better food access and education, Elizabeth will work to increase safe, well-resourced recreation programs for kids, fighting to ensure that there is an equitable access to recreation centers and greenspaces in every community so kids across this city can stay healthy and active.

Expand access to health care across the city, with a focus on preventative and population based strategies and health equity. One of the most important drivers of a better Baltimore will be health equity for all our city’s residents. As Mayor, Elizabeth will expand safety net programs provided by the city government, ensuring that the residents that need these crucial services, such as testing, family planning, and vaccines, have access to them. She will fight for expanded access to healthcare for populations that have traditionally experienced disparities, working with existing institutions that provide excellent care to increase training, education, and services at all our City’s providers. Finally, she will seek to build a coordinated and prevention-based healthcare landscape in Baltimore; support the Health Department in its establishing coordination and dialogue with all city partners to develop a health blueprint for the city; integrate a public health perspective into all functions of City Hall; partner with hospitals, clinics and health centers on a health blueprint for the city; and expand the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response so that the city is ready for any public health emergency that comes its way.

Work to address health issues affecting our city’s youth. Although this City has made great strides in ending the health issues affecting our youth, we still have work to do. The number of babies born with low birthweight in Baltimore is double the national average,
and access to care in our schools is still lacking. As Mayor, Elizabeth will work to expand and sustain the B'More for Healthy Babies program, ensuring that this city’s success in terms of neonatal care continue to build and grow. She will also work with community leaders, local clinics, and youth to devise and implement community-specific education strategies targeted at lowering the teen birth rate, curbing the spread of STDs, and increasing safe sex practices among our youth. She will expand existing home-visit programs for at-risk and first-time teenage mothers. And she will increase school-based physical and mental health services for children across the city, and use telemedicine to improve the coordination of care across schools.

- **Fight to end the drug addiction epidemic in the city.** Drugs ravage communities, shaking the foundation of our city. We must continue to fight the spread of drugs in our neighborhoods while ensuring that those who have fallen victim to addiction receive the care they deserve. As Elizabeth explained in her Blueprint on Fighting Crime, for far too long, we have been addressing the public health issue of drug addiction through a criminal justice model. This flawed framework has unintended consequences for both addicts and the community as a whole. Building on the strategies set out in that platform, Elizabeth will work to expand access to buprenorphine to help people recover from opioid disorders, and Naloxone training and distribute programs to combat overdose deaths. She will establish increased 24/7 emergency care for those experiencing drug-related complications and ensure that drug treatment options are more widely and readily available to residents. Finally, she will work with community leaders and groups to expand educational services targeted at reducing drug related complications and increasing knowledge about prevention and care options.

- **Combat the spread of communicable diseases.** Baltimore still ranks among the five highest cities in the world in terms of its infection rate. We have made strides in reducing these prevalent health problems, but continued, thoughtful measures are needed to bring an end to the large scale spread of these illnesses. Elizabeth will grow funding for programs to combat communicable diseases; work with the health department to train community health educators in each Baltimore neighborhood to increase awareness of major risk factors and prevention strategies for HIV and hepatitis C; sustain and expand current communicable disease prevention methods; increase testing of diseases like HIV/AIDS in prisons; and improve the availability of key medications like pre-exposure prophylaxis for those who need it.

- **Expand care for those experiencing mental illness.** Although Baltimore constitutes just over 10 percent of the population of Maryland, it represents more than 30 percent of all inpatient cases for mental illness in the state. We must continue to fight this incredibly
important issue and work to implement thoughtful, community-based strategies. As Mayor, Elizabeth will work to expand care for those experiencing mental illness, building on current strategies including stabilization centers for 24/7 urgent care, and seek to expand screening, address trauma, and increase educational services in our City’s prisons, schools, and clinics.

• **Develop public health goals that include and reflect the voice of the city.** For any public health strategy to be successful, we need to include the ideas, needs, wants and voices of our residents. As mayor, Elizabeth will implement regular “Health Town-Halls,” in our City’s neighborhoods, ensuring that residents can voice their opinions and hold the government accountable to their concerns. She will include the ideas and voices of community members in any public health strategy that is employed, making sure that every initiative is implemented in a way that is the best for each and every neighborhood.