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Moved and Shaken*As the East Side Biotech Park Comes In, Area Residents Come to Terms With Getting Out*

Sam Holden

LIFE ON THE STREET: Helen Curbeam on the steps of her city-owned home in Middle East

By **Charles Cohen**

Helen Curbeam takes down the letter that she has tacked in the middle of her pink living-room wall. She tries to smooth out creases before looking at it once again.

Dear Ms. Curbeam:

I am writing to you regarding a serious matter concerning your continued occupancy at your current address . . . You are hereby notified that your family will be required to move not earlier than 90 days from this date of letter . . .

Curbeam, a smartly dressed 67-year-old who sports gold-framed glasses and a youthful face lined with worry, has been living in this city-owned public-housing property in the 2000 block of East Eager Street for 34 years. She has lived in this neighborhood all her life. After placing some of her belongings in storage, in case she ends up on the street, she looks up and asks a visitor, “Can they really put me out?”

They can, and they might, more or less. The 90 days specified in the letter have already expired; as of mid-February, Curbeam is still in her Eager Street home facing a new moving-out deadline of Feb. 28. She says she is trying to convince authorities at the Housing Authority of Baltimore City, which is in charge of helping her find a new home, to place her in a two bedroom home like the one she lives in now. But the Housing Authority says that, as a sole tenant, she can only get a one-bedroom place. So here she remains, uncertain of what happens next or where she will go.

Curbeam is one of hundreds of residents of East Baltimore’s Middle East neighborhood who have been presented with an ultimatum over the past four years. After living in houses they have owned or rented for years, decades, even generations, they are being forcibly moved out of their neighborhood to make way for a \$1.2 billion, 2 million-square-foot life-sciences and technology park featuring offices for biotech companies, retail space, and neighborhoods’ worth of new housing.

Since 2000, the city and the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions have worked to make the massive 80-acre project a reality. East Baltimore Development Inc. (EBDI), the nonprofit



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ON A CLEAR DAY: The future site of the East Side Biotech Project



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organization created in 2002 to take charge of the project, has been touting a new east side, with new jobs, schools, roads, facilities, green space, trees, and the kinds of homes and improved services that area residents have wanted for decades. Ronald Peterson, president of the Johns Hopkins Hospital and Health System, said at a groundbreaking in November 2005, “We are about to turn a blighted area into a lively urban environment filled with a mix of residents, high-tech businesses, shops, and hopefully plenty of brain space as well. When this project is complete East Baltimore will be transformed.”

But before all that can come to pass, EBDI has to get current residents out of the path of the project. Thanks to the city of Baltimore’s power of eminent domain, 395 households north of Hopkins Hospital have been moved already. Homeowners in the affected area have been given a relocation package of up to \$70,000 each plus the appraised value of their homes; renters are being given five to six years’ worth of the rent they were paying to be applied toward their new monthly rent elsewhere. EBDI has hired Timonium-based housing relocation specialists Diversified Property Services to help residents find new homes in Baltimore’s booming real-estate market. EBDI also has a system in place that will train area residents for some of the 6,000 biotech jobs the project is expected to bring.



Jefferson Jackson Steele

SAVIORS: (from left) Save Middle East Action Coalition members Lisa Williams, Marisela Gomez, Shrene Burnett

EBDI claims that the east-side project will be a national model for such development initiatives, that what’s being done in East Baltimore isn’t just warmed-over urban renewal. But despite the involvement of well-intentioned organizations such as Baltimore’s charitable Annie E. Casey Foundation, the developers and their allies find themselves dealing with the same limitations that have hobbled other such initiatives—that the rhetoric that sounds so good around the conference table has trouble keeping up with the realities of uprooting and resettling hundreds of households. Many Middle East residents, even many of those who have been relocated to bigger homes in nicer neighborhoods, still feel they have not been sufficiently included in the planning and process of the project. And then there’s the subtext lodged in such a massive use of eminent domain: This new neighborhood is going to be too good for you.



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The powers-that-be behind the project have vowed that the neighborhood’s transformation won’t push aside the lower-income residents who have made the area home for years in favor of gentrification. EBDI’s plans call for a third of the 1,500 to 1,800 units of new housing to be priced for lower-income residents and another third for what EBDI President and CEO Jack Shannon Jr. calls “work-force housing for medium-income people, like firefighters, police, nurses,



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BREAKING GROUND: East Baltimore Development Inc. President Jack Shannon

teachers.” The remaining units will be set at “market rate” (two-bedroom homes in nearby Butchers Hill are priced currently in the \$300,000 range). What’s more, those displaced to make room for this new Middle East will get first right of refusal on buying into the new developments.

But for now, they have to leave, and they leave amid uncertainties, unanswered questions, and suspicions.

“This project has been a smoke screen,” says Lisa Williams, president of the Save Middle East Action Committee, a community group that has attempted to insert itself into every crimp of the complicated development process. “They sell the project [by saying] that everyone is very happy about the project, that the residents here are delighted to be relocated to ‘a better area’ to make a better life for themselves. That’s not true. You had residents that were very happy living here. We were hoping for redevelopment, but renovating development, without displacement.”



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NEW LEASE ON LIFE: Relocated East-sider Deirdre Howard

The people at EBDI, of course, have a different take on the community reaction. “I think the work we’re doing is very important and has been in many ways, quite innovative,” Shannon says. “At its core, our work has always been focused first and foremost on the needs of our residents, and the overall objective is to ensure East Baltimore’s future as a mixed-income, mixed community of choice.”

Save Middle East and the residents it represents and EBDI and the interests it represents will have plenty more opportunities to share their views and try to come to terms. Some 50 acres of the huge development site, divided into areas EBDI has dubbed phases II and III, are still on the drawing board in terms of what will be built and when. Phases II and III are full of residents who haven’t begun to negotiate the terms of their exit, although they know that, thanks to an “urban renewal” bill passed by the Baltimore City Council in December 2002, their homes are subject to be taken away by the city’s power of

eminent domain at any time.

But when demolition began in early February in the initial 30-square-block area known as Phase I, Curbeam wasn’t the only one still trying to hammer out a deal with the powers-that-be.

Betty Walker received the same letter as Curbeam in late 2005, and she, too, had put up a fight with city Housing Authority. Her adult cousin and brother, both ailing, both dependent on her care, lived with Walker in her home in the 1900 block of East Eager Street, which she had rented from the city for 34 years. She had hoped to move with her cousin and brother into a two-bedroom apartment. But the Housing Department told Walker the city is only responsible for Walker, who held the lease.

Moving trucks showed up outside Walker’s home on Feb. 14. By the day’s end she would be

temporarily living in the Perkins Homes housing project on South Caroline Street. She was forced to put her cousin in a senior citizen's home, something that she hopes will be temporary, as the city continues to try to find her and her cousin a new home. Her brother would have to make his own way.

But Walker spent most of Valentine's Day watching as movers emptied out the house she called home. "I wanted all three of us to be together," she says. "I've been trying to get as good a deal as I could. I have put in a lot of work. I can't deal with it anymore. I'm tired."

For some Middle East residents, their displacement offers a welcome opportunity to imagine a new life. The glee in 29-year-old Yvette Brown's eyes was unmistakable one afternoon in December 2005 as real-estate agent Millie Lloyd whisked her away from Middle East to tour homes in Hamilton. After a short drive, they cruised past green lawns enshrouded in a peaceful hush unknown on her stretch of Eager Street. Brown says she is accustomed to the sound of gunfire on an almost daily basis, but noted that her grandparents "can't get up and run in the house like they used to when someone gets to shooting."

Brown was out scouting homes for her grandparents, who raised her, but soon she was thinking out loud that she and her 12-year-old son could move in with them. "Look at these little porches," Brown says, staring out the car window as Lloyd drove her from house to house. "That will be nice. They can sit out on the porch."

Although the prospect of a new home and new start can't help but appeal to many Middle Easterners, that doesn't mean they didn't want to stay where they were. Homeowners and longtime renters recall a neighborhood of friends, corner stores, eccentric neighbors, and streets full of kids.

"I miss it," says Deirdre Howard, 43 who relocated from McDonogh Street to East 37th Street in Waverly in April 2005. "When it was hot, everybody sat on the steps and played ball. There were water hoses and a bucket. And that was fun. You could see kids playing football in the snow. Now [I] don't really see kids doing that."

Not that the old Middle East was paradise. The area was hit hard by the crack epidemic in the 1980s, and kept down by the resilience of the heroin trade. The neighborhood deteriorated, but the more stable residents sidestepped drug dealers and maintained their properties amid the boarded-up homes. Even the problems were part of the fabric of the neighborhood.

Lucille Gorham, a 75-year-old community activist who was relocated to Belair-Edison in November after raising eight children on Chase Street, says she sorely misses "good morning conversations" with neighbors that went back 20 years. Although she says she's happy with her Kentucky Avenue home, with its neat garden out front, she says she feels like she's living in a desert.

"It's a feeling of loneliness," she says. "I'm not complaining. I'm just saying, regardless of how nice people are to you and how they help you relocate, there is a feeling [missing] that they can't duplicate. Whether it was a bad neighborhood and how it seemed to other people, it was my neighborhood and I lived there. I felt like I just know every little crook, I know where to go, what to do, who to see. You just don't have that feeling up here. You just don't move and get in a groove. Neighborhood life just isn't like that."

Her old neighborhood, aka Phase I, is far from picturesque in early January. Bounded by Broadway to

the west, Chase Street to the north, Madison Street to the south, and Washington Street to the east, the area is a ghost town. A muddy field at 855 N. Wolfe St. will soon sprout the biotech project's first life-science facility, but now it's home to an impromptu memorial of sagging balloons and exhaust-grimed teddy bears clinging to a street lamp. An old man pushes a walker down a block of boarded-up homes; a truck full of architectural plunder sits with its wheels up on cinder blocks. On deserted Durham Street, almost every rowhouse is neatly sealed in plywood, ready for demolition.

Helen Curbeam has seen many changes over the lifetime she's lived in this part of town. It has gone from a neighborhood where, she says, kids "used to help me churn the ice cream with the old-time churner" decades ago to a neighborhood where, one night about two years ago, she heard a "pop pop pop" and opened her door to find a kid she recognized, maybe 13, lying in the street, shot. "I feel his pulse to see if he's still living," she recalls. "I'm trying to talk to him. His eyes was going back in his head."

Curbeam has had her own tangles with neighborhood thugs. She was once one of the instigators of a neighborhood watch program, but it crumbled under intimidation from local drug dealers. These days, she bakes sheet cakes for the dealers to remind them that she's a sweet old lady.

On her kitchen table lies a copy of letter from Baltimore Police Maj. John Dodson urging a quick relocation process: "I have grave concerns about the safety of Ms. Curbeam in the current environment." Next to the letter sits a photograph of a chunk of cinder block sitting in the middle of her bed—a message that came crashing through her window. But what's lurking outside is not what has been keeping her up late. It's the threatening letter from the city Housing Authority doing the bidding of EBDI.

All she wanted, Curbeam says, was to move from her two-bedroom apartment to a place big enough to fit all her things—a worn antique couch, a night stand, some computer gear—that wouldn't come close to fitting in the one-bedroom flat that the city Housing Department relocators showed her. "A filthy hole" is what she calls it.

"I lack knowledge in a lot of things, but I'm not that backward," she says. "I can understand when someone is trying to set me up or turn around things to make me think you're for me when you're really against me."

Curbeam lives in one of 28 city-owned housing units that were in the Phase I area, says Housing Department spokesman David Tillman, who takes umbrage with Curbeam's characterization that she's being taken advantage of. He says the city Housing Authority will continue to work with residents so long as they are reasonably cooperative, "but we need assurances from the tenant that they will be open to different neighborhoods."

Even some of the East Baltimore plan's most vigilant critics concede that the forces behind the project seem to be making a bona fide effort to improve the lives of the residents. EBDI and its partners say they're not trying to merely shift major social ills—poverty, disinvestment, poor education, drugs, lack of opportunity, racism, classism—out of the area. They're trying to eradicate them. Annie E. Casey Foundation President Douglas Nelson says that the plan to allow displaced residents to share in the rewards of revitalization has never been done before.

"I continue to describe it as a high stakes, high risk, but [with] potentially enormous reward," Nelson

says. “Not only for what it could teach us about Baltimore, but what it can teach us about investing in formerly disinvested and neglected neighborhoods around the country that concentrate families of poor people.”

He adds that homeowners are making real money on homes that were severely undervalued because of the state of the neighborhood. “This is an opportunity to have low-income folks benefit in the redevelopment of the neighborhood,” Nelson says. “Up to now those neighborhoods haven’t benefited much from the so-called urban improvements.”

Still, if the deal seems rosy for residents displaced by the project, Raymond Winbush, director of the Institute for Urban Research at Morgan State University and a consultant to the Save Middle East Action Committee, says that it’s because of community protests and adverse publicity over the project. “EBDI was kicking and screaming when they had to get pulled to the table, rather than just sitting down and talking,” Winbush says.

In August 2002, Save Middle East emerged as a force to be reckoned with when its members held a protest on 78-year-old Therle Green’s front steps on East Madison Street. By protest standards, the picketing was pretty paltry, but the photographs of bulldozing and Save Middle East’s bullhorned slogans were enough to grab attention. (Green has since relocated, and his house has been cleared to make ready for what’s to come.)

Save Middle East President Lisa Williams says getting EBDI to respect the residents’ point of view has been an ongoing battle. “They—and when I say ‘they,’ [I mean] Hopkins and the city—did not see the residents, the people of this community, as a principal component to this development project,” she contends. “They expected to come in here and push us out and not have us to say anything.”

Save Middle East’s ongoing crusade has undoubtedly drawn media attention to the residents’ concerns and made them a higher priority for EBDI, but not everyone believes its role has been entirely positive. Former Save Middle East president Pat Tracey left the group in 2003 in part because she felt the organization’s aggressive attitude made it ineffective and alienated potential allies within EBDI. A certain amount of aggression keeps things moving, she acknowledges, but too much makes people stop listening: “You can’t always be in people’s faces and think that people will want to work with you.” Yet, Tracey adds, Save Middle East is the only organization that keeps watch over the course of the development and the developer. And many feel they still need watching.

EBDI hosts monthly relocation meetings with residents, but Save Middle East executive director Marisela Gomez offers instances where she says the committee, and therefore the residents, have been shut out of the process. She says Save Middle East was denied a say in helping to choose the housing relocation services. The organization has yet to see the EBDI’s agreement with Forest City Enterprises, a Cleveland-based construction company hired in 2004 to build the life-science building and residences slated for Phase I; to date Save Middle East members also have been denied a meeting with Forest City. The committee still hasn’t seen an overall master plan for the area, Williams says.

EBDI’s Jack Shannon says that his organization has to answer not only to Save Middle East but also to other residential groups, as well as stakeholders and investors. By the very nature of eminent domain, he says, EBDI was put in a tough spot initially, and “as a result there have been times where the community has been fully in support of what we’re doing, and other cases perhaps less so.” Shannon says he believes that the project has reached a “critical mass” of acceptance.

After five years of back and forth, EBDI is only now talking about bringing in two community members

on the nonprofit's 11-member board. Currently, the board includes only one "community member": Stanford Britt, an architect who has done work in East Baltimore since 1960 but doesn't live in the neighborhood. Shannon says that seat and one other will be turned over in April to either recently relocated or current residents of East Baltimore.

And, referring to one of the most sensitive issues, Gomez says that EBDI has yet to set a sale price for the hundreds of low-income homes to be built in Phase I. Many Save Middle East members suspect that these homes will not be affordable to low-income people. (Shannon says that the planned low-income housing units will be priced at up to 50 percent of area's median income, which for a family of four today is \$37,000 a year.)

Asked why Save Middle East wants to be so involved in the planning process when many of its members remain skeptical that the revitalized east side will have any place for them, Gomez says that phases II and III remain an open book. The thinking among planners at EBDI, including Shannon, right now is that a portion of the existing homes may be rehabbed, not purchased and knocked down, and some of the residents will remain where they are. If that ends up being the case, the current Middle Easterners will have a far bigger stake in the neighborhood than they do now, Gomez says, and therefore staying in EBDI's face is in their best interest.

"We know the history, we know the injustice, and we know this is forced redevelopment," Gomez says. "[But] we know we can push it to be more equitable and make this community [ours]. Don't roll over and play dead."

As a light snow fell on Dec. 5, 2005, Shannon met with about 40 people from Phase II at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, in hopes of drawing current residents' interest in the community-planning process. Instead, he and representatives from EBDI and the Annie E. Casey Foundation faced a skeptical crowd. Some were seasoned from round after round of conflict and protest surrounding Phase I. Some were likely well-versed in the decades of good intentions that rotted on the vine in the neighborhood north of Hopkins Hospital.

After all, community activists from Middle East spent four years from 1996 to 2000 working with planners to come up with a revitalization plan where residents would stay for the improvement. A community-driven economic development plan wasn't without precedent. In 1984 in the Roxbury/North Dorchester area of Boston, residents created their own master plan, solicited developers, and then approached the city of Boston with a ready-to-go proposal. Known as the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, it is now celebrated as an example of community empowerment. Then, in January 2000, Middle Easterners read about the biotech park in *The Sun*.

"We were really pissed about that," Tracey says. "[We] wasted four years of our time looking at something that we wanted, only to find out that there is another plan on the table, and it wasn't about the people who lived there all those years, dealing with the drugs, dealing with the crime, dealing with poor services. And now you want us to leave and put something there that we wanted in the first place?"

The tension in St. Wenceslaus' basement was so thick that Ralph Moore Jr., the director of the Community Center at St. Frances Academy, who was asked to run the meeting, called a time-out and urged residents to get past anger. "At some point," he said, "you got to put it on the record what it is you want. "

A man in a flannel shirt and slacks had enough of listening. “They always talk about bringing in new jobs,” he said. “What jobs? I done heard this all my life. It’s all about displacement of people to get people out the way for a project that will have nothing to do with them.”

Shannon jumped out of his chair and went over to the man as if he was the only other person in the room, as if he could win over doubters one by one with some face time. “It’s a community process,” Shannon told the man. “And, if at the end of this process I haven’t delivered, you have a right to kick my backside up and down Broadway or whatever street you want.”

“That whole night, they tried for two hours to get people to give input of what they want,” Save Middle East executive director Gomez recalls. “And they couldn’t get beyond the anger and the distrust.”

What good relations do exist between EBDI and the city on one side and the Middle Easters on the other exist largely because of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Having Casey—a charitable organization with a \$3 billion endowment dedicated to uplifting disadvantaged children and their families—involved in the project gives credence to EBDI’s claim that it is trying to be sensitive to the residents being displaced. Not only did Casey raise \$5 million, roughly 50 percent of the relocation package, but it, along with Hopkins, paid for the housing counselors, family advocates, and legal services for residents contemplating signing contracts. Casey helped bring residents’ concerns about exposure to lead dust during demolition to the table, allowing for the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning to draft a new protocol to take down the vacated homes (“Dust Up,” *Mobtown Beat*, June 2, 2004; “Danger Zone,” *Mobtown Beat*, March 16, 2005).

Williams, Gomez, and Tracey all describe Casey as essential in getting many of the community’s needs hammered out into policy. “If we didn’t have Doug [Nelson] at the table, people would have been moved all last year, and been moved anywhere,” Tracey says. “The whole project would have looked totally different.”

In fact, Casey, which has had a family services office in East Baltimore since 1994, had planned to put the area on a list of 22 cities and neighborhoods nationwide marked for its Making Connections Initiative. An ambitious 10- to 15-year funding and assistance commitment to help make lower-income families more self-sufficient in terms of education, jobs, and participation in the political process, the program is designed to improve neighborhoods without going to the extremes of gentrification. Then the plans for the biotech park were announced, and Casey had to scrap its plans for the area.

In 2002, Middle East residents in the path of the biotech park were being offered the appraised value of their homes plus the federally required \$22,500 or whatever it takes for them to find a similar home to the houses they left; a four-bedroom home in Middle East could be had for \$62,000 in 2001, but a similar house in other neighborhoods could cost double or triple that amount. Save Middle East leaders believed, however, that residents should be getting something out of the deal, something to give them momentum. As Williams says more than once, “We didn’t ask to be relocated.”

From his office in the Casey Foundation’s gleaming Mount Vernon headquarters, Nelson notes that economic development isn’t exactly the foundation’s business. When approached by EBDI board Chairman and CEO Joseph Haskins in 2002, Nelson admits, “my reaction was one of deep hesitation, and an inclination to decline that opportunity, because Casey, and lots of places around the country, had evaluated urban renewal projects as doing much harm as good, and often being disadvantageous of low-income residents of renewal targeted communities.”

But the more he talked to Haskins, the more Nelson says he recognized the advantages of being an

insider advocating for the community. The other choice, he says, was to stand by and watch as “people’s lives were going to be pushed to the point of opportunity or crisis.” Casey agreed to get involved in 2002 and raised \$5 million, boosting the relocation allowances and funding the services for relocating residents. “We tried to put together the best relocation package in the nation,” Nelson says.

Nelson says he’s not looking for Casey to be merely the humanitarian guardian of the biotech project. He’s hoping Casey’s uncomfortable detour through the contentious world of economic development will help some displaced residents find nice homes, and, most of all, he’s looking to come away with a strategy wherein residents benefit when forced out to make way for a massive economic gambit.

“We have seen elsewhere where urban renewal succeeds it sometimes succeeds at the . . . exclusion of low-income people,” he says. “Everything that Casey is doing is propelled by the desire to protect the interest of low-income families, including preserving their opportunity to benefit, to remain and return to this neighborhood, even if this project is so successful that the neighborhood becomes too successful or hot beyond what anyone imagines.”

The organizers behind the East-Side biotech project concede the verdict is still out on whether or not displaced residents will come out better off, but they like what they see so far. “The evidence in the first 24 months is promising,” Nelson says. “That is as far as I would go.”

EBDI points to a survey of relocated residents released Nov. 8, 2005, that rates its performance in fairly glowing terms—an overall 8.1 satisfaction rating out of 10. The survey, commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and conducted by ABT Associates, also found that 55 responders (69 percent) out of 157 families said they were “much better off” after they relocated.

EBDI’s Jack Shannon notes that “between the fair-market value [for their homes] and the relocation benefits we’re providing for families, they are realizing \$140,000 on average that they are investing in new homes. For many of them, that means they are not taking on a mortgage.”

Speaking from her new home in Belair-Edison, former Wolfe Street resident Tonya Baker-Moye considers herself lucky to scoop up the house for \$70,000 in February 2005, meaning that she would have no mortgage payment. These days she finds herself getting used to a quiet that she never experienced on Wolfe Street, where she had lived alongside drug dealing and occasional gunfire in past. “Me personally, I was ready to go,” she says. “It couldn’t come too soon for me.”

But Nelson says the next dilemma is determining how residents will move on with their lives away from their old neighborhood and support systems, facing new neighborhoods full of strangers.

When the biotech park’s plan was first unveiled, Deirdre Howard was fortysomething and single. A year later she was pregnant. She wasn’t sure how she was going to afford a baby on a part-time housekeeper’s salary, and she worried about mysterious skills like changing a dipper. She couldn’t imagine raising the child in her dilapidated McDonogh Street rental.

She and her EBDI family advocate, LaShea Mulet, became close. Mulet drove Howard to her prenatal checkups. It was Mulet who spotted the recently renovated house on a quiet hill off 37th Street in Waverly.

“When I had [my son], I didn’t want to raise him in that home,” Howard says while her son sleeps

upstairs in her spacious rowhouse. "I had to have something better, and by the grace of God and His blessing, I have this one."

Yet there are downsides to her new situation. Howard has no car, but on the east side, she could shop at Northeast Market or catch a lift elsewhere with her best friend, who lived right around the corner. On 37th Street, it's a seven-block walk to the Giant, and her stroller is broken. She's uncomfortable with sending her child to day care, so she's not working at the moment. She is not taking advantage of any of the counseling or training programs offered to relocatees.

Mulet, whose caseload has included 76 of 395 families since the relocation started in 2004, swings by to give Howard a ride to the grocery.

"Once she gets back on her feet, she'll be all right," Mulet says. "She has so much potential. She's going to do wonderful."

Stripped of all the talk of community building, the biotech park project shimmers with the kind of economic potential unseen in Baltimore since the internet boom and bubble of the late '90s and early '00s. But unlike dot-coms, which generated billions in start-up funds with no proven demand, the demand is already out there and waiting in the biotech field, says Anirban Basu, CEO of the Sage Policy Group, an economic and policy consulting firm in Baltimore. The need for a cancer cure or a treatment for diabetes is well established, Basu notes, though the amount of investment in research can be costly and uncertain.

"It's difficult to imagine a riskier venture than the endeavor to develop a new drug," Basu says. "The cost of the development typically runs in the hundreds of millions and can cross the billion threshold. And at the end of the day, after all the investment and all the effort, one might not have a commercially viable product. That's risky."

Being home to the National Institutes of Health, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Maryland Medical School, and adjacent to Washington, Maryland has been dubbed the third-most supportive environment for biotech industry in the world (after California and Massachusetts) by the U.S. Department of Commerce. But industry observers say Maryland has rested too much on its laurels and hasn't done enough to attract new businesses. Hopkins and the University of Maryland need private research and lab space to tap the potential of their brainpower.

"One could argue that these biotechnology parks should have been up and running two decades ago," Basu says. "But better late than never."

Johns Hopkins keeps a fairly low profile when it comes to the development project. Officially, Hopkins Hospital and its research institutions have two seats on the EBDI board, but Hopkins public-relations people bristle whenever the project is called the Johns Hopkins biotech park. If Hopkins isn't necessarily the engine directly behind the project, it most definitely provides the fuel that fires it. Hopkins has provided \$5 million for the relocation package and has committed to leasing a third of the space of the first life-science facility to be completed as part of Phase I.

Whether the biotech park is Hopkins' baby or not, Charles Wagner, proprietor of the Crescent barbershop on Chase Street, across the street from EBDI's offices, sums up the community's view: "Hopkins gets what Hopkins wants."

At a Nov. 8, 2005, ribbon-cutting ceremony for senior housing, Ronald Peterson, president of the Johns Hopkins Hospital and Health System, said his organization has been an “enthusiastic supporter of this undertaking” and “tried to put together the best relocation package in the nation.

“Nevertheless, it’s very difficult for people to move from their homes,” he acknowledged. “Uprooted residents will get the first crack at the new housing, and that’s the good news. These men and women have made enormous sacrifice to help their community rebuild itself. They are really the heroes of this story. Not only do they deserve our support but our gratitude in applause.” Applause followed.

Some feel they deserve something more tangible. Tracey says that, when she was Save Middle East’s president, she put forth the idea that a percentage of the profits generated by the biotech park could go right back to the community. She says the idea quickly disappeared from discussions. (EBDI’s Shannon says proceeds from Phase I of the development will help fund acquisition and relocation in the subsequent areas.)

While Williams and her husband, Johnny, are still in their huge house on Wolfe Street with two kitchens (“I like to cook”), she says she plans to hand over her leadership role soon to someone more intimately involved in the neighborhood. But she still frets and wonders. She finds it odd that EBDI hasn’t started any construction—not on the biotech park, not on the rehabbing effort on McDonogh Street, and not on senior citizens housing, despite the Nov. 8 ribbon cutting.

Her husband, now dozing in a nearby easy chair, videotaped the ceremony, and the tape plays on the couple’s massive TV set as Williams chats. On screen, Doug Nelson takes the podium and challenges everyone in attendance to create a legacy that would be bigger than the biotech park.

“We have a chance in East Baltimore,” he says, “a real chance and a rare chance to build a monument to fairness—to fairness for the people who have lived here, who have suffered here, and who have stuck to the possibility of hope and renewal for this community.”

Asked if she thought that such a monument would exist in the new east side, Williams says no: “I think it’s going to be an overburden, gentrified area.”

As far as she’s concerned, she can’t believe in EBDI, Casey, or anyone else who says that the original residents will eventually make it back to the new Middle East. Williams says that she doubts former residents, especially the elderly, will have the stamina or funds to move back, and that higher property taxes will eventually drive low-income homeowners out of the area, leaving the neighborhood open for the gentrification she believes EBDI, Hopkins, and the city have hoped for all along. Until current residents are really made partners in this project, she says, “I will not believe them until we start seeing people actually moving [back] in.”