In 1998, the Annie E. Casey Foundation approached the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers (ABAG) to explore the interest in Baltimore for developing a neighborhood indicators initiative. That initial exploration led to a two year-long planning process resulting in the gathering of several citywide nonprofit organizations, city government, neighborhoods, and foundations, which led to the creation of the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA). BNIA then became a partner in the Urban Institute's National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP), currently a collection of 36 cities across the United States dedicated to developing and maintaining neighborhood data systems and the democratization of data. In 2006, BNIA moved to the University of Baltimore's Jacob France Institute in an effort to expand on the capabilities of BNIA and was renamed the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance – Jacob France Institute (BNIA-JFI).

The *Vital Signs* report provides outcome indicators that "take the pulse" of Baltimore neighborhoods by measuring progress towards the goals of: strong neighborhoods; good quality of life; and a thriving, vital city. The goal of this effort is for neighborhood residents, organizations, and others to use data and the *Vital Signs* report strategically and effectively to foster new ways of thinking about improving our City, neighborhoods, and government over time.

The Purpose of Vital Signs

When the *Vital Signs* indicators first came out in 2002, the innovation at the time was allowing communities to see the integration of information previously difficult to obtain and visualize. Today, the *Vital Signs* indicators serve as a **common or shared measurement system**[1] for neighborhoods to understand where they stand relative to city, state and national benchmarks. This will allow all communities to track the impact of mutually-reinforcing activities towards the common goal of a better quality of life in every neighborhood.

With the goal of developing a shared measurement system, we analyzed national trends, academic research, local plans, and community input to ensure that the overall set of indicators is relevant to Baltimore's community-based stakeholders.

- *National best practices*: Through the NNIP network, BNIA-JFI is connected to 35 other cities for learning and staying ahead of the curve regarding research and development of

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[1] Mark Kramer, John Kania (2011). "Collective Impact" *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

neighborhood based data-driven initiatives. New indicators reflect the need to include a similar set of data for easier cross-site comparative analysis.

- *Local planning processes*: Several local and regional plans over the past decade have included specific indicators to monitor the effectiveness of plan implementation, such as the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, Sustainability Plan, Healthy Baltimore 2015, and the regional Sustainable Communities Initiative. The Vital Signs indicators are intended to serve as means of tracking and evaluating the relevant neighborhood impacts of city and state plans.

- *Grant writing resources*: Analysis of grant applications for programs such as Community Development Block Grant, Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers Common Grant, and Maryland Sustainable Communities Grant identified several indicators that organizations need access to for satisfying basic data requirements for community-based grant writing for funding.

Planning for Vital Signs 11 *and Beyond*

After 10 years of producing *Vital Signs*, BNIA-JFI began a strategic planning process in June 2011 to assess relevant neighborhood indicators for Baltimore City neighborhoods for incorporation into subsequent reports beginning with *Vital Signs 2011,* and continuing into future *Vital Signs* reports. The elements in the process included the following:

- *Public History Project:* A project was launched in November 2011 to document the origins and history of the organization through archival research and interviews with founding persons. Participants were asked about their views on how the Vital Signs indicators could continue to serve neighborhoods over the next decade. A series of products were developed including full documentation of the organization's origins and development, a brochure celebrating the 10-year history of BNIA-JFI, and a video documenting the history of the organization.

- *Engagement of Steering Committee:* The BNIA-JFI steering committee was newly-constituted in June 2011 and now consists of over 25 members representing community groups, non-profits, governmental agencies, higher educational institutions and foundations. Through bi-annual meetings with the committee during the past 18 months, new indicators were vetted for utility and relevance.

- *Indicator Roundtables:* New indicators were discussed with the over 150 attendees in 2011 and 2012 at Baltimore Data Day[2], an annual workshop hosted by BNIA-JFI for

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[2] For more information on Baltimore Data Day, visit www.bniajfi.org/baltimore_data_day

neighborhood data users. During July 2012, a series of 5 roundtable conversations were held with neighborhoods stakeholders.

Based on the input from these projects and conversations, new indicators were identified that not only build from existing expertise in data acquisition and analysis but also increase capacity to better address issues that matter to neighborhoods today. The *Vital Signs* report will continue to be "comprehensive", providing cross-cutting data on a wide-variety of quality-of-life issues, but with more focus on information that is "hyper-local" and available for the 55 Community Statistical Areas.

What's New in Vital Signs 11

This edition of *Vital Signs* tracks over 150 indicators on the quality of life in Baltimore's neighborhoods. These indicators, when combined into each community's profile, generate a picture of what is happening in each neighborhood. Many of them are new for 2011 and should resonate on almost every topic at the forefront for neighborhoods. From vacant housing to walkability to crime amelioration to clogged storm drains, the indicators in *Vital Signs* corroborate (or dispel) perceptions of residents, business and other stakeholder about the quality of life in Baltimore's neighborhoods. As communities continue to plan ahead over the next decade, these outcome indicators can now be used as inputs into strategic planning processes as well as tracking and monitoring the effectiveness of neighborhood-based activities.

Understanding the Housing Market

Baltimore City's neighborhoods have not been immune to the vagaries of the foreclosure crisis, declines in sales prices, tightening of mortgage markets and a general over-supply of housing regionally and nationally. Although *Vital Signs* reports have been tracking housing-related indicators since 2000, these recent housing market forces combined with other factors of neighborhood change in an urban setting required the development of a more robust set of indicators to truly assist neighborhoods preparing for ongoing change.

Although foreclosure rates in Baltimore City fell to just 1%, its lowest level in over a decade, median sales prices of homes sold in 2011 was $100,000, a continued decline from 2010 of $15,000. Housing affordability continues to burden some communities like Edmondson Village where 60.9% homeowners spent more than 30% of their income on mortgage costs.

Affordability Index for Mortgages, 2007-2011

Affordability Index:
- 25.3 - 31.9
- 32.0 - 38.3
- 38.3 - 43.2
- 43.2 - 49.3
- 49.3 - 60.9
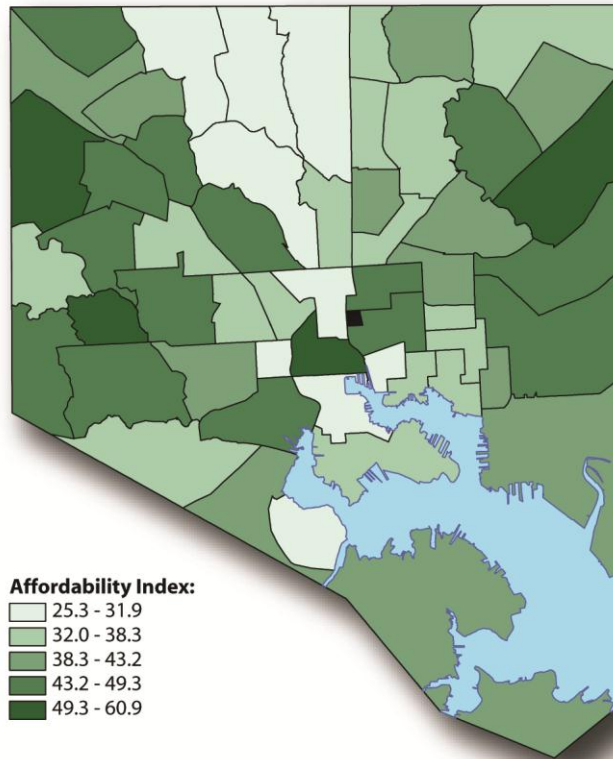
The nature of homes sales also varies by neighborhoods. Over half (50.8%) of the homes sold were cash-based sales, as opposed to mortgage-based. Cash-based sales suggest investment transactions that may not be occupied by the buyer, leased out to a renter, or possibly not occupied at all. In some communities, such as Southern Park Heights, more than 90% of home sales in 2011 were cash-based.

The City saw a slight decrease in homes with a Vacant House Notice (VHN) violation from 7.9% in 2010 to 7.8% in 2011. That percentage declined most in Greenmount East which was also a community that experienced a high rate of demolition permits (16.2 per 1,000 homes). While homes with a VHN are generally easy to identify, homes that are habitable yet unoccupied are less obvious. One way to track unoccupied homes is using USPS data on homes that no longer receive mail; in 2011, 7.5% of homes no longer receive mail.

Focus on Sustainability

The growth of local and regional planning efforts on sustainability, as well as national economic and societal changes, have led to more sustainable behaviors by residents, businesses, and communities For example, more use of public transportation, more tree plantings on both public and private spaces, and more efforts paid to reducing energy use. *Vital Signs 11* augments previous measures of sustainability such as clogged storm drains and community gardens with 21 new indicators. Many of these indicators required in-depth research and coordination with new City agencies, area institutions and disparate organizations that collect data in various forms.

Walkability is now a key factor for urban neighborhoods in attracting people looking for easy access to restaurants, shops and other amenities. Baltimore City's Walk Score® is 52.4, which places the City in the "Somewhat Walkable" category overall. Downtown, Midtown and Fells Point have Walk Scores higher than 90, which is categorized as a "walker's paradise". Whether by choice or because of inability to afford a car, 29.6% of Baltimore City

households do not have access to a car. In Oldtown/Middle East, 70.8% of households do not have access to a car.

Data Stories

Every data point in *Vital Signs* represents a human story—of why the data exists and the people working to move the needle on each of the indicators. Steering committee members for BNIA-JFI provided Data Stories to help frame the context for why the indicators matter for quality of life in neighborhoods. Also many Baltimore area universities are engaging in primary research agendas that produced information actionable at the neighborhood level. Vital Signs 11 coordinates the incorporation of the research results from other institutions in order to tap into expertise in these specific areas:

- **Indicators on healthy food access**: the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future developed Fast Food Density (Measures of Food Swamps)

- **Indicator for tree canopy**: the Baltimore Ecosystem Study developed tree canopy measures

- **Indicators for public art**: the Maryland Institute College of Art Public Art Mapping data and

These eight stories each take a deeper look at an indicator and come from community groups, research organizations, non-profit groups, and local government.

Fast Food Outlet Density, 2011

Density per 1,000 Population:
- 0.0 - 0.6
- 0.7 - 1.4
- 1.5 - 2.3
- 2.4 - 4.6
- 4.7 - 22.3
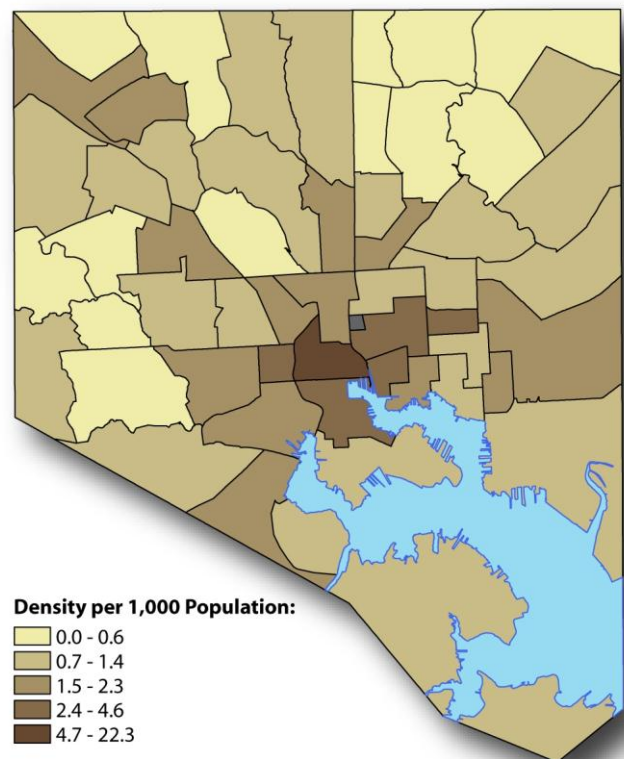
How to Use Vital Signs Data

The indicators and data in *Vital Signs* are organized into nine sections each of which describes an issue or area that is central to quality of life in Baltimore City. The data within each of the sections provide a picture of the conditions within Baltimore City's neighborhoods and their progress over time. These sections are:

- Census & Demographics;

- Housing & Community Development;

- Children & Family Health and Well-being;

- Crime & Safety;

- Workforce & Economic Development;

- Education & Youth;

- Arts & Culture; and

- Sustainability;

Data within each of these sections are divided into additional subsections that allow for indicators to be clustered together around specific topics, such as housing conditions or safe neighborhoods, educational attainment, or student performance.

Vital Signs is a compilation of lots of data. There are over 150 indicators for each of Baltimore City's 55 community statistical areas, which means that there are over 8,000 data points in *Vital Signs 11*. Interesting facts and trends, graphics and community rankings are all included in the sections. Positive or not positive changes over time are highlighted throughout the sections for easy interpretation of the data. With so much information in this report, it has been produced in a way that should serve as a reference guide to communities throughout the year.

Vital Signs is also 'open data'. All of the indicators from previous *Vital Signs* are online for everyone to see and download for use in a variety of innovative ways. Also available online are Community Profiles for each of the City's 55 Communities that provide quick access to data specific to each neighborhood's needs.

Data Consistency

The purpose of Vital Signs is to monitor quality of life for Baltimore's neighborhoods; however, *Vital Signs 11* marks a clear change in what indicators are being monitored over the next decade reflecting changing times and changing needs. There are many differences between previous *Vital Signs* and this 11th edition. New indicators have been identified throughout each section, and when longer-term trends could be established, the report does so.

Geography and Data

The geographic level at which data is provided is important to understand. Wherever possible, *Vital Signs* uses Community Statistical Areas (CSAs) as the geographic level for which data is provided. CSAs are clusters of Census Tracts that correspond to Baltimore's neighborhoods boundaries and are consistent statistical boundaries for which data can be acquired. Neighborhood lines often do not fall

along CSA boundaries, but CSAs are representations of the conditions occurring within those particular neighborhoods. The CSAs were originally created in 2002 and were for *Vital Signs 10* using new 2010 Census Tract boundaries.

Many of the data sources in *Vital Signs* is based on administrative records (housing code violations, vital statistics, 311-service calls, foreclosure filings, etc.) precisely because U.S. Census information was only available at the neighborhood level once every 10 years. Starting with *Vital Signs 10*, however, data from the American Community Survey has been made available for the City's neighborhoods. The new data collection methodology adopted by the Census Bureau means that while the data will be available more frequently, the indicators are not directly comparable with the 2000 Census or from one year to the next. Throughout *Vital Signs*, use of the 5-year 2007-2011 ACS data is noted for clarification.

Baltimore City Community Statistical Areas (CSAs)