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Residential Real Estate

## OpEd: Baltimore could add 40K residents by building the right housing

By Annie Milli – Goldseker Foundation  
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### Story Highlights

- Baltimore could add 20,000 households over the next five years.
- The city added households in 2020 for the first time since 1970.
- New housing developments in Greektown and Pigtown succeeded in early 2000s.

For decades, vacant rowhomes have been offered as proof that no one wants to live in Baltimore City. This logic, repeated often enough to be accepted as fact, has shaped policy, planning, and investment decisions across administrations.

Unfortunately, it's been wrong – and it's cost us years of missed opportunity.

While consumer trends have changed significantly since the 1970s – the first decade in which Baltimore experienced declines in both population and occupied housing units – one preference has remained consistent: Americans love new construction.

Across regions and economic cycles, housing development has been one of the most reliable drivers of migration in the United States. Build it, and they will come.





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Even in Baltimore, where construction has lagged behind surrounding counties since the 1960s, the pattern holds true. In the last 25 years, large townhome developments in Greektown and Pigtown succeeded quickly in the early 2000s. New housing, wedged between a railyard and a bus depot, near I-895 and Eastern Avenue sold rapidly prior to the pandemic. More than 120 newly built townhomes on West North Avenue, an area historically defined by vacancy, are now filling briskly, as are more than 800 apartments, townhomes, and condominiums [on the former site of South Baltimore's abandoned Locke Insulators plant](#).

More importantly, as these developments have sprouted, Baltimore has grown. For the first time since 1970, the city added households in the 2020 Census – exclusively in places where new housing was built. And, recently, the 2024 Census estimates showed modest population gains, driven by sustained household increases that finally overcame decline.

Now, for the second time in a decade, Baltimore has the chance to embrace housing development as a scalable growth strategy.

Housing market research by the nationally renowned firm Zimmerman/Volk Associates, [released this month by Live Baltimore](#), confirms the city's residential growth potential. If the right housing is built, Baltimore could add at least 20,000 households, or more than 40,000 people, over the next five years.

To put this in perspective, that's roughly half the household growth achieved by Austin, Texas, and Charlotte, North Carolina, from 2010 to 2020, and approximately equal to the increases realized by Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia during the same period.

The benefits of these gains would be so transformational, adding nearly \$1.8 billion in new household income to Baltimore's economy and at least \$52 million to the city's annual budget for public services. We should be compelled to achieve them.

So how can we?

First, the city must translate Zimmerman/Volk's projections into ambitious, public growth targets – much as Mayor Bowser did when she proclaimed, in 2019, that D.C. would add 36,000 new housing units by 2025. (They added more than 40,000.)

Second, Baltimore must take deliberate steps to enable the specific housing the study identifies. Match targets to vacant and underutilized property, resolve zoning and entitlement constraints to enable rehabilitation and new construction, adjust incentives to make projects viable, and invite the development community to execute a coherent plan.

Third, officials must track and publicize their progress by embedding a system for counting housing starts into the city's workflows, and publishing regular growth reports, just as Baltimore County and peer cities do annually.

Compared to 2020, when Zimmerman/Volk last projected the city's residential growth potential for Live Baltimore, external conditions are even more favorable for success today. Crime is at historically low levels. The city, state, and private sector have made unprecedented commitments to vacancy reduction. And the statewide Housing Starts Here agenda offers alignment and support for new construction.

A misreading of market dynamics has held Baltimore back for far too long. Other jurisdictions are racing to attract households and investment through housing development. Baltimore can finally compete – if it's ready to embrace its potential and get to work.

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