

BESpeak

OCTOBER 2016

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Port Covington Development: Political Victory, Compromise or Surrender?

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader



Wearing my bright blue BUILD t-shirt, I made my way to the War Memorial Building past hundreds of other bright colored t-shirts representing various labor and community groups. Baltimore's *Taxation, Finance and Economic Development Committee* was holding a September 8th work and voting session on the Port Covington development deal. All these groups were coming to make their voice heard. And there were many voices.

As many of you already know, Sagamore Development, the company trying to build Under Armour's expanded campus and surrounding community, sought a \$660 million tax increment financing increment (TIF) deal from the city. The deal was almost fast-tracked through last spring when Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) and other organizations slowed the process down in order to raise concerns. A coalition of groups feared the deal would serve only business interests and leave the rest of Baltimore out in the cold.

A TIF, or "Tax Increment Financing," is a tool used by local government to support new development, especially downtown districts and prime real estate. TIFs pay for new infrastructure (roads, sewers, and sidewalks) in preparation for construction of apartments or office buildings. The city sells bonds to private investors and uses the money to build infrastructure at the development site hoping that the new development will raise real estate taxes and increase city funds to pay back bondholders.

The problem is that some TIF's benefit the public more than others. Sometimes developers get sweet deals and the public is left out. Through a long, hot summer, the coalition BUILD joined demanded more from Sagamore. It asked that "promises" be made into legally-binding "commitments." It wanted more guarantees around low-in-

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Professor of Philosophy, MICA

ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

Every Sunday, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Individualized programs for preschool children and school aged students.

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Fritz Williams *Leader Emeritus*

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You Have Reason to Vote November 8

by *Paul Furth, BES President*



On Tuesday, November 8, our country will decide who will be our nation's 45th President. Your Society encourages every member to vote while we avoid any partisan suggestion on how to vote. Working with groups like Out For Justice, we have shown our commitment to the democratic process by reaching out to register individuals from under-represented communities. And we'll continue that effort long past this coming election.

Despite the importance of our elections, there are too many people who are eligible to vote yet don't. Many of the excuses I hear range from, "My vote doesn't matter/won't make a difference," to "Registering puts me at risk to be called for jury duty." While I accept the right of anyone not to vote (I disagree with pressuring people to vote), the lack of understanding of the importance of that vote confuses and saddens me. While many political outcomes in a general election are highly predictable, especially in a state like Maryland, I write this column with hopes to convince even the most resistant member and nonmember alike, regardless of party affiliation, to exercise the right to vote.

It's more important **THAT** you vote than **WHOM** you vote. And my opinion only has strengthened through the years. Although it may help to hold this view while steadfastly refusing to belong to any political party, I've had the honor and experience of managing a political campaign for a friend. While he had no major funds nor substantial help from his own political party (he won competitive primary elections but didn't win general elections, one becoming historic when in 2008 two openly gay candidates from opposing parties ran in a general election for a state-level office - perhaps a subject for a future column), this experience did give me some perspective on the election process and politicians.

A quick search on the Internet reveals a plethora of reasons to vote, from the obvious yet uninspiring ("Civic duty," "Honoring our history.") to the curious ("Honoring Founding Father Benjamin Franklin's challenge to us all."). Certainly all valid; however, if I were a reluctant voter, I doubt that evoking civic duty or the name of a founding father would get me to the polls. The following are some additional reasons to vote, that your political science textbook may not cover, for you to consider.

Vote to strengthen your political discourse. We freethinkers tend to enjoy lively civil discussions. However, I think much less of a political argument made by someone who doesn't vote. In all good consciousness, how can anyone claim to be interested, much less care, about democracy and the political situation of this country if voting is treated as worthless? I generally will avoid discussions with a non-voting citizen as there's little I can learn from this person.

Some don't vote because candidates from the two major parties are terrible and third party candidates don't win. First, no candidate will match up perfectly to any-

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ETHICAL EDUCATION WEEKEND

Friday, November 4 – Sunday, November 6 at Stony Point, N.Y.

Contact Melissa Sinclair, National Director for the American Ethical Union and Director of Lifelong Learning at the Washington Ethical Society and Member of the Northern Virginia Ethical Society. Registration and schedule coming soon at aeu.org.

Tots-to-Teens Cultivate Ethics In October

The Theme for October is “Life Cycle” and the Ethical Core Value is expressed through “I” statements:

- I am part of the earth; I cherish it and all the life upon it;
- I learn from the world around me by using senses, mind and feelings.

Reading from books (“The Dead Bird” (Margaret Wise Brown), “The Fall of Freddie the Leaf”(Leo Buscaglia); “The Garden” story (from Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Lobel); Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen are coordinated with the activities of watercolor and oil pastel painting, gathering of autumn leaves and sculpting with Playdough to make real the life cycle concept with the Pre-K children and teacher Jill Gordon.

The same type of “making-it-real” activities are present with the Pre-

Teens (and teacher Monica Cooper) by emphasizing and showing works of art, listening to music, viewing videos from TED talk and working together to create an image of something that would make the world more

beautiful, using supplies and assorted materials.

Taking the theme of “Life Cycle” to another level, the Teens (13-17) with Coordinator Tevis Tsai, encourage learning from the world (environment) by using their

senses, mind and feelings on an October BES project.

A special addition to the Ethical Education Program curriculum is the inclusion of the culture of Spanish-speaking peoples (music, language, food, art, stories) during the 4th Sunday of each month. These lessons are taught/facilitated by Anita Brownstein.



ALL BES TEENS: CONTACT Tevis Tsai (systemicerror@gmail.com) for participation in activities and events of your interests, curiosities, wonder, explorations.

TODDLER CARE

Separate supervision provided for children up to age two.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Poetry Group

Sunday, October 2, 9:30 a.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, October 9, 9:30 a.m.

Board Meeting

Sunday, October 9, 12:30 p.m.

Charm City Film Series

Wednesday, October 12, 6:30 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, October 16, 12:45 p.m.

BES Boo!

Saturday, October 22, 6:00 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, October 30, 12:30 p.m.

SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

All are invited to bring snacks for our coffee hour following platform. Snacks are especially welcome from those whose last names start with:

A to F	October 2
G to L	October 9
M to R	October 16
S to Z	October 23
Everyone!	October 30

NAVIGATORS MEETING

Sunday, October 9, 3:00 p.m.

NAVIGATORS, USA, Baltimore Chapter 43, will be having a meeting on October 9 at 3:00 p.m. <https://navigatorsusa.org>

Navigators Curriculum: <https://navigatorsusa.org/curriculum>

SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

OCTOBER 2

“BUILD One Baltimore”

Baltimoreans United In
Leadership Development (BUILD)

Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development – is a broad-based, non-partisan, interfaith, multiracial community power organization rooted in Baltimore’s neighborhoods and congregations. BUILD is dedicated to making our city a better place for all Baltimoreans to live and thrive. For more than 35 years, BUILD has worked to improve housing, increase job opportunities, and rebuild schools and neighborhoods, among other issues. We are affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a coalition of like-minded organizations in cities across the United States. In 2015, BES joined BUILD and has been actively participating in their work on voter registration and the Port Covington TIF. Come learn more about BUILD and how you can help out. Visit BUILD on the web at www.builtiaf.org.

OCTOBER 9

“Be Honest with Death”

Hugh Taft-Morales
Ethical Culture Leader

For those who do not have a belief in heaven or reincarnation, managing one’s mortality can be psychologically challenging. What are some of the ways we can process the poignant and terrifying realization that each one of us is going to die? Hugh Taft-Morales does not have the answer – he has many answers. Some approaches work better than others to ease that cold existential shiver that runs down his spine when the grim reaper invades consciousness. He borrows from Buddhists to existentialists, from Morrie Schwartz to Monty Python. Come explore some light shone on this darkness.

Hugh Taft-Morales joined the Baltimore Ethical Society as its professional leader in 2010, the same year he was certified by the American Ethical Union as an Ethical Culture Leader. He also serves as Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia. His presence in Ethical Culture has been termed “invigorating.” Taft-Morales lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, with his wife Maureen, a Latin American Analyst with the Congressional Research Service, with whom he has three beloved children, Sean, Maya, and Justin.

OCTOBER 16

“Represent Maryland - A Grassroots Movement to Fight Political Corruption”

Matthew Lindauer
Humanist Activist

Represent Maryland is a local chapter of the national organization known as Represent.Us. Our goal is to pass a Maryland state law modeled after The American Anti-Corruption Act in order to send representatives to Congress who are, as James Madison wrote, “dependent upon the people alone,” and to eventually pass The American Anti-Corruption Act federally. While the act itself is the goal, our grassroots strategy of involving as many citizens as possible in the political process will be the true tipping point in reducing the corruption of our political system.

Matthew Lindauer hails from Southwest Ohio, graduated from Ohio State University with a degree in Criminology, and moved to Baltimore in March of 2016 after 10 years of service in the Marine Corps as a Tactical Data Network Operator and Manpower Officer. He resigned as a Captain from the service in order to support and defend the Constitution against domestic threats like hyper-partisanship, civic ineptitude, and materialism that he views as equally concerning as any foreign threat.

From 2013 to 2016, Matt volunteered as an active member of the Secular Coalition for North Carolina to uphold and maintain secular values in legislation and public policy. During that time he also served as a board member for the Humanists & Freethinkers of New Bern, a chapter of the American Humanist Association. He currently serves with Baltimore’s Civic Works as a Math Fellow tutoring 6th and 8th graders in mathematics at Windsor Mill Middle School. He is the Education & Outreach Committee Chair for Get Money Out Maryland, as well as a board member. He recently organized the local chapter of Ben Franklin Circles, a group dedicated to gathering people for discussions on Franklin’s 13 virtues and civic servitude. He hopes to attend the University of Maryland in 2017 to begin research in their psychology department under the Social, Decision, and Organizational Science division. His personal military decorations include two Navy & Marine Corps Achievement Medals, a Navy & Marine Corps

SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

Commendation Medal, and an Iraq Campaign Medal. His wife of 3 years, Maria, is also a graduate of Ohio State University and has worked for the Social Security Administration over 8 years. They do not have any children, but unfortunately for Matt, have 2 cats named Pequeno and Frank.

OCTOBER 23

“Intimate Partner Violence in our Community”

Faith Savill

Community Relations Specialist, House of Ruth Maryland

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The House of Ruth Maryland leads the fight to end violence against women and their children by confronting the attitudes, behaviors and systems that perpetuate it, and by providing victims with the services necessary to rebuild their lives safely and free of fear. Their vision is that one day, every woman in Maryland will be safe in her own home. Come and increase your awareness of the problem of intimate partner violence and learn how you can help women in need. Visit House of Ruth on the web at www.hruth.org.

Faith Savill currently works for House of Ruth Maryland in Community Relations. She coordinates volunteers for all of their programs, as well as much of their outreach in the community. As a member of the Development team, she also helps with event logistics and coordinates the annual holiday Adopt A Family program. Faith completed two Americorps terms in Baltimore, serving with My Sister's Place Women's Center and Project PLASE. She loves to talk about volunteerism and how you can support your community!

OCTOBER 30

“Gun Rights and the Threat to Freedom and Democracy”

Firmin DeBrabander

Professor of Philosophy, MICA

Possibly the most emotionally charged debate taking place in the U.S. today centers on the rights of citizens to bear arms. The core argument of Second Amendment advocates is that firearms are essential to maintaining freedom, providing citizens with a defense against possible government tyranny, safeguarding our other rights. But do guns indeed make us free? This philosophical examination exposes the contradic-

tions and misinterpretations inherent in the case presented by gun rights supporters, and provocatively demonstrates that lax gun laws actually hinder democratic participation.

Prof. Firmin DeBrabander received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Emory University, and is on the faculty at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). His specialties include the History of Western Philosophy, Ethics, Political Theory, and Environmental Ethics, and also teaches courses on Media Ethics, Economic Theory, Eastern Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, and Medical Ethics. He is the author of ‘Spinoza and the Stoics’ and has published academic articles in History of Philosophy Quarterly, International Philosophy Quarterly, and other academic journals. He has written social and political editorials for the Baltimore Sun, Counterpunch and Common Dreams. He has organized symposia in honor of Constitution Day including such speakers as John Waters, Helen Thomas, Angela Davis, Ralph Nader, Jesse Jackson, Amy Goodman, Andrew Sullivan, and Cornel West.



Saturday, October 22, 6:00 p.m.

Enjoy a family-welcome, Halloween-themed dinner at the Baltimore Ethical Society. It will be a meet, eat, and greet evening of scrumptious food, good company, and lots of Spook-tacular activities including pumpkin and cookie decorating and classic games aplenty! Fun activities for all from toddlers to teens including costume contests (kids and adults). Bring a dish (any dish) or just attend this potluck supper. Beverages will be provided. Doors open and festivities begin at 6:00 p.m.

Join the committee of Monique Stins (Chairperson), Argentine Craig, Kim Knox, Max Romano, Tevis Tsai, Paul Furth. We still need 4 more volunteers. If interested, please contact Monique at momiek1@hotmail.com.

CHARM CITY
film
SERIES

Wednesday, October 12,
6:30 p.m.

This month, the Charm City Film Series will be screening *The Salt of the Earth*.

For the last 40 years, the photographer Sebastião Salgado has been travelling through the continents, in the footsteps of an ever changing humanity. He has witnessed the major events of our recent history; international conflicts, starvations and exodus. He is now embarking on the discovery of pristine territories, of the wild fauna and flora, of grandiose landscapes as part of a huge photographic project which is a tribute to the planet's beauty. Sebastião's Salgado's life and work are revealed to us by his son, Juliano, who went with him during his last travels, and by Wim Wenders, a photographer himself.

The film is free and open to the public. Donations are suggested. Refreshments are provided, and films are followed by discussion led by a local expert on the issue.

The Charm City Film Series meets each month on the second Wednesday.

FLOWER POWER IS BACK!

Want a beautiful garden next spring? Want to help BES? Get your seeds and bulbs through *Flower Power* and BES gets some money in return. Thanks to a joint initiative between Gardener's Supply and Dutch Gardens, over a million people are invited to participate each year.

Pick up a catalogue at BES or visit www.flowerpowerfundraising.com/campaign?campaign_id=24196 and we will get 50% of the proceeds from every sale. Help even further by sharing with your friends and family or on Facebook.

You Have Reason to Vote November 8

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one's ideals. Secondly, someone will be elected, so it's better to vote for the candidate you like best (or detest least). Even if your candidate doesn't win, your vote still matters. Every election is tabulated. If you dislike the candidates from the major parties, having large percentage of voters for third parties will get politicians' attention.

Your vote matters more than you may know. In most elections, only a small fraction of eligible voters participate. Politicians know that they can win elections appealing only to ~10% of eligible voters. So, of course, politicians tend to take extremist-type positions to attract this most consistent voters. Politicians would more rarely attempt unethical actions against the public and would take more centrists/moderate positions if 75-95% of eligible voters participated in elections. Appealing to that many voters would keep out extremists.

In the eyes of politicians, if you don't vote, you don't exist. Many elected officials take this quite literally, which makes efforts by certain politicians engaged in voter suppression all the more insidious and reprehensible. Fortunately in Maryland, our elected

officials are making voting easier for all eligible voters, even extending this right to those who served felony sentences. Although who you vote is between you and the ballot, that you vote (and register) and your party affiliation are open to the public and readily accessible to politicians and candidates. When constituents ask for assistance from their representatives, the first thing politicians may do is to check if the constituents are registered and if (and how often) they voted in the past few years. If one didn't vote, or worse, didn't even register to vote, help is far less likely. It sounds harsh, and the ethics can be argued that all citizens are represented by those who are elected whether they voted or not. But these elected officials are busy (legislating, attending meetings, campaigning, etc.). Why should they bother to help someone who won't take the effort to vote?

There are more reasons that your vote counts and that you would benefit by voting. Hopefully, the few additional reasons above will get those who are resistant to vote, to think about the importance that all our participation in the democratic process is the key to democracy.

Port Covington Development: Political Victory, Compromise or Surrender?

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come housing in the development district, good paying permanent jobs for Baltimore residents, protection for the education budget so that schools would not lose funding, and more.

I will not go into details about the final specifics of the deal – they are complex and it would take a much longer article. Besides, as of this writing, final wording is still being clarified. But I know that the deal almost fast-tracked through the process was much worse than what seems to be coming out as a final deal. I see a 20% “goal” of local hiring for all onsite positions raised to a 30% mandate for infrastructure construction jobs. I see a goal of 10% affordable housing made into a mandate to provide affordable units, or payments to enable others to provide affordable units equivalent to 20% of all housing at Port Covington. I see a minimum wage of \$17.48 and \$5.93 for health and pension benefits that many unions are applauding.

Granted there are loopholes. Granted it would have been best for the process to have been more transparent and deliberate from the start. But given political realities, I am not sure that had BUILD taken a more re-

sistant stance it could have stopped this TIF from being approved with less concessions to groups advocating for the poor and working families of Baltimore.

I was proud to support BUILD’s efforts to draw attention to these social justice issues, as well as the financial risk the city would take in a TIF deal. I saw first hand the passion and effort of lead BUILD organizer Rob English, BUILD co-chairs Rev. Andrew Foster Connors and Rev. Glenna Huber, and BUILD staff to get the best deal they could and showed up to support their efforts.

Not all in War Memorial Hall, and not all Ethical Society members, felt the same. For some, the final deal did not do enough to both address the needs of the most marginalized and safeguard the city’s financial future. Two BES members were very disappointed about how things seemed to be turning out. Some in the audience shouted their disapproval, with cries of “Baltimore deserves better,” and “You’re robbing the city,” and “Justice not charity!” One BES member emailed me that same night echoing Councilman Stokes great regret that an

independent study was not conducted about future economic impact of the Port Covington development and TIF arrangement.

While I appreciated these skeptical perspectives, and I am less sure of my position than before, one argument made by BUILD leadership stuck in my mind. BUILD leaders had determined that the TIF deal was going to happen – the political support was too great to be stalled any further by public protest. I don’t know if this is true. But I did know the commitment to social justice and untiring work for marginalized communities undertaken by BUILD leadership, so I gave them the benefit of the doubt. Only time will tell what kind of a deal ultimately was crafted in the political-financial furnace that is city government.

I greatly respect those who disagree with my position, and are disappointed with the role BUILD played in creating a more responsible final deal. I respect one BES member who yelled out for all to hear while leaving the event, “No vote until all the details are public!” I encourage them to submit an article to next month’s *BESpeak* about their perspective. Ethical Culture has grown out of the freethought movement and I encourage freedom of expression and healthy, respectful debate.

But I still believe that BUILD’s leadership did the best they could given political realities. I thank them for pouring their energies and intellect into the process. I doubt I could have done a better job. Perhaps this is a typical political compromise that will leave some bitter and others satisfied. The final judgment will be how this will leave Baltimore. We will see.





BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

306 W. Franklin Street, Suite 102, Baltimore, MD 21201-4661

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, October 16, 12:45 p.m.

Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society!

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, October 30, 12:30 p.m.

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Come to the Newcomers Meeting, held following the last Sunday Platform of every month, and find out more about Ethical Culture and our Society – its history, its philosophy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour and are recommended for anyone who's curious about membership. Please attend at least one Platform before going to a Newcomers Meeting. Contact Wayne Laufert or Janey Solwold for more information.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, October 9, 9:30 a.m.

Mindfulness is a tool we can use in our daily lives to act in a more ethical way. We practice mindfulness meditation so that it comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.

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