

# Soboblog: Masonville Cove goes 'green'

May 6, 2009 by [admin](#)

The **Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center** is part of a \$153 million restoration project that is transforming one of the most contaminated areas of Baltimore Harbor into a refuge for wildlife and a place for city residents, particularly its schoolchildren, to learn about ecology and protecting the Chesapeake Bay.

The Masonville Center is part of the restoration of more than 54 acres of shoreline along the Middle Branch near Curtis Bay and Brooklyn. The restoration began when the Maryland Port Administration moved to expand its dredging operations in the harbor and create a new dredge replacement facility near the Fairfield Terminal. But first the MPA needed to clean the area up.

Like most of Baltimore Harbor, Masonville Cove was once host to heavy industry. It is the former home of Kurt Iron and Metal and the Maryland Shipbuilding and Drydock Company. The site was also used as a dumping ground for debris after the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904.

More than 61,000 tons of trash and debris have been removed, along with 306,074 gallons of petroleum-tainted water, 17,398 tons of timber, 6,588 tons of concrete rubble, 5,265 feet of electrical wire, and 4,047 pounds of electrical equipment containing toxic PCBs, a chemical used widely in many industrial applications and a known carcinogen. There also are 27 abandoned boats, ships and barges being removed from the water at the site.

After being used as a dumping ground for trash and chemicals for the last century, Masonville Cove has become a place where we can enjoy and educate our kids about our most prized natural resource: the Chesapeake Bay. Through programs developed and run by the Living Classrooms Foundation and the National Aquarium, kids can learn about the history of the bay, all the wonderful wildlife that live off its bounty, and how to protect it.

Even the center itself is an example of ways we can protect the environment. The center is a “near-zero, net energy” building, which is a fancy way of saying that it has lots of “green” features which make it much more efficient to operate—74 percent more efficient than a conventionally designed building of the same size.

Some of those green features include an air conditioning system that will use about half the energy that a conventional building uses, solar energy power, rain barrels that collect roof rain runoff to water plants and flowers, a reflective roof that decreases the amount of heat transferred into the building, and an energy recovery ventilator where exhaust air is used to heat or cool fresh air using a heat exchanger, making ventilation more efficient.

Outside, there will be an environmental park and wildlife area, hiking and biking trails, a boat ramp for wind- and muscle-powered boats including kayaks and canoes, and trash interceptors to keep trash from floating into the harbor.

What started off as a project to maintain the harbor's dredging operation turned into a cooperative effort between the port authority and local community groups, including Concerned Citizens for a Better Brooklyn and the Brooklyn-Curtis Bay Coalition, to clean up the bay and turn a polluted site into an area where residents can finally enjoy access to a clean waterfront in their neighborhood.

“This project is not only a great example of an environmental clean up, but it’s also an example of how good things can get done when everyone works together towards a common goal,” said Delegate Brian McHale, who spearheaded the effort.

McHale was aware of the expanded dredging operation the MPA was pursuing as well as the communities’ wish for a cleaner waterfront park in their neighborhood. Knowing that both goals could have similar outcomes, he brought the groups together to negotiate.

“The MPA was going to have to spend the money to clean up the site anyway to use it for their dredging operation and the neighbors wanted a clean place to enjoy the water. It just made sense to me to have both groups talk to each other. It couldn’t have worked out better,” added McHale.

The restoration work is not complete. Although the education center is open to the public, much of the land on the rest of the site will likely have to be replaced or cleaned due to its long industrial history. In the meantime, another section of the waterfront that was once unusable is being brought back to life.

—by Colleen Wolfe

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