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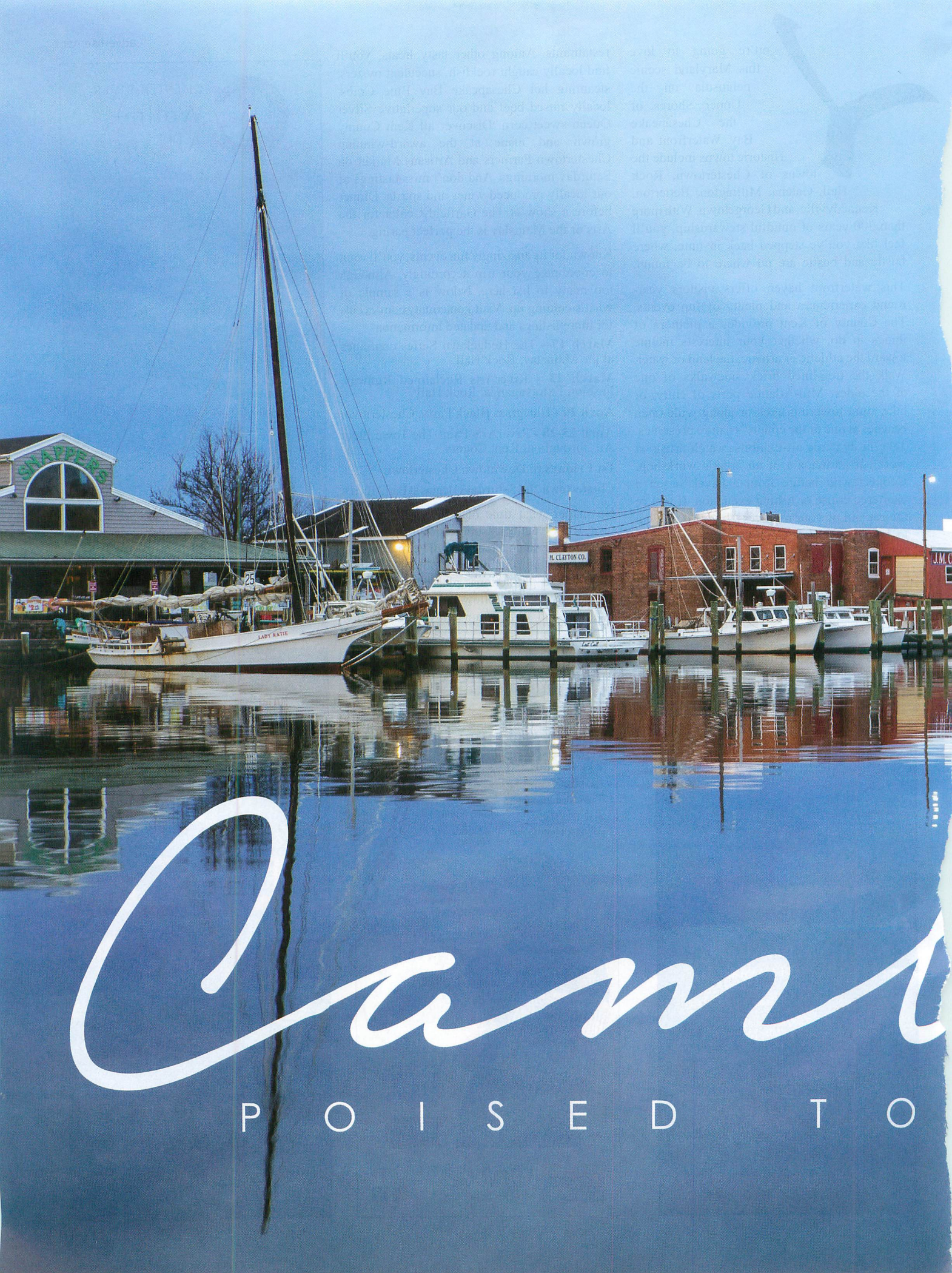



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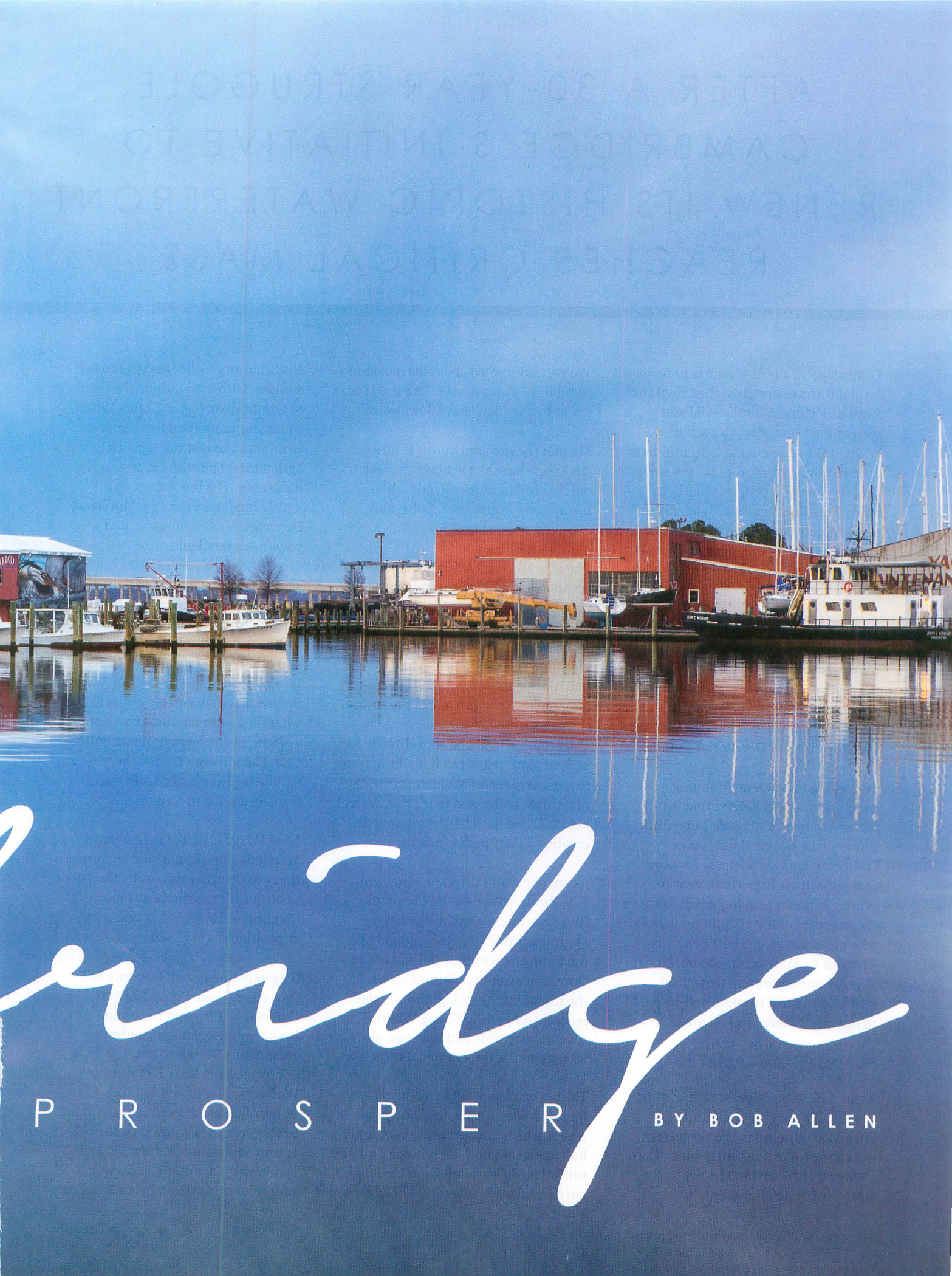
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P R O S P E R BY BOB ALLEN

AFTER A 30-YEAR STRUGGLE, CAMBRIDGE'S INITIATIVE TO RENEW ITS HISTORIC WATERFRONT REACHES CRITICAL MASS

Cambridge's collective efforts to revive its picturesque stretch of the Choptank River as a vibrant commercial and recreational center reach back to William Donald Schaefer's second term as Maryland governor. Since the early '90s, incremental progress has been made, but there have also been false starts and discouraging setbacks due to ebbs and flows in the economy, shifting political winds, and other forces largely beyond the scope of local leaders.

But finally, after nearly three decades, the path seems clear to redeveloping more than 25 acres of prime riverfront property in a manner that provides public access and creates a much-needed mixed use economic engine for both the city and Dorchester County.

"It is going to be an outstanding program that will deliver that 'wow factor' [to the Cambridge waterfront] I have often talked about," says Cambridge Mayor Victoria Jackson-Stanley, who is in her 11th year in office. "When it is done, it will make the majority of the six million people who cross the bridge [the Senator Fredrick C. Malkus, Jr. Memorial Bridge] every year and drive past Cambridge want to come and be part of our city's fabric and history."

PLANS CRYSTALLIZE

Robert Hanson is president of the Cambridge City Council and his Fifth Ward includes the targeted waterfront. He lives little more than a stone's throw from the property slated for redevelopment.

"We're really excited about the mixed-use possibility," Hanson says. "We need some stores that we don't have downtown."

Though the specifics of this future landscape have not yet been ironed out, likely amenities include a hotel, restaurants, coffee bars, pubs, and specialty retail shops.

The overall revitalization will be complemented by Cambridge's existing waterfront landmarks such as Long Wharf, the Dorchester County Visitor Center, the Choptank River Lighthouse, a city marina, and a maritime museum, which is set to open near the riverfront in the future.

The project will not be shovel-ready for several more years, but it finally appears to have attained long-elusive critical mass. Just in the past year or so, several key obstacles have been surmounted, creating a clear path forward.

As anyone who's driven eastward on U.S. Route 50 across the Choptank River can attest, Cambridge has a stunning waterfront, highlighted by the imposing 100-foot-tall sail of the Dorchester County Visitor Center, the Choptank River Lighthouse, the recently refurbished Long Wharf, several boatyards and marinas, and intermittent stretches of open space.

The big challenge until recently has been finding a way to unify these existing assets, which are not contiguous, and link them with both Cambridge's nearby central business district and the long-envisioned waterside commercial center.

A significant hurdle was cleared last summer with a \$6 million overhaul of Cambridge's historic Long Wharf, which, for more than two hundred years was a hub of the region's thriving agricultural and seafood processing industries. The renovation was jointly funded by the city, Maryland Department of Commerce, and a governor's bond bill.

The wharf now serves a variety of recreational and commercial uses, ranging from concerts and festivals to a docking place for cruise ships and other seagoing vessels. The World War II Liberty Ship *SS John W. Brown* made a week-long visit to the wharf last summer and drew 7,000 visitors. At the August ribbon cutting, Gov. Larry Hogan lauded the project as "the beginning of a really great transformation in Cambridge."

Long Wharf is part of the former Maryland Port Administration property that was declared surplus by the state in 2013 and transferred to the city of Cambridge the following year with strict stipulations as to how it can be used.

"The agreement with the state is very clear," says Frank Narr, a Cambridge CPA and insurance broker who serves on Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc.'s seven-member board. Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc. is a nonprofit comprised of development professionals appointed by the city, county, and state that was created last year to facilitate the complex waterfront transformation. As a board



Aerial view of the Cambridge Marine Terminal circa 1962.

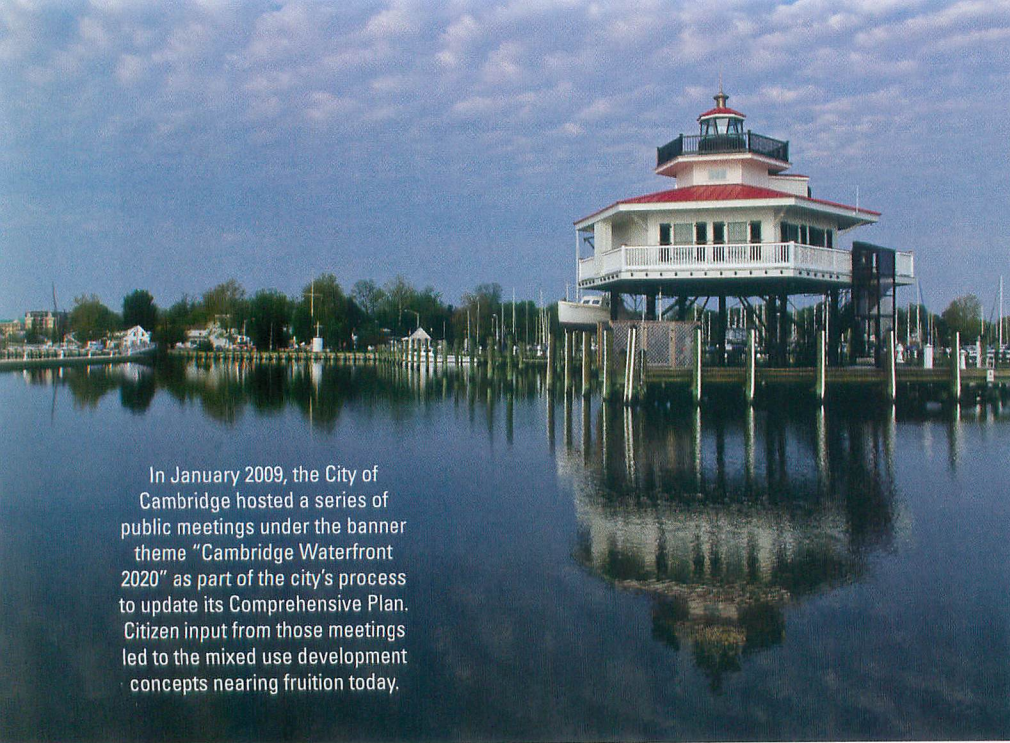


The Maryland Port Authority property (outlined in red) will eventually merge with the hospital property (in blue) to create a 25 acre site ripe for mixed use development.

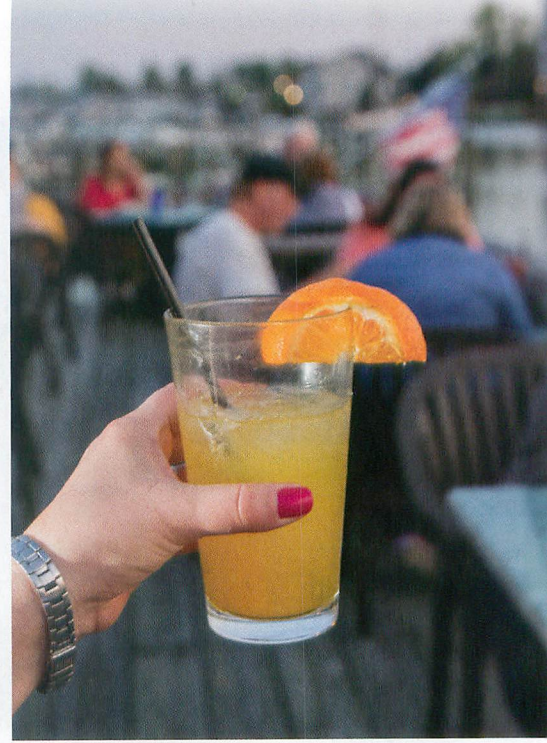
member, Narr represents Sailwinds, Inc., another nonprofit that has been advocating for waterfront renewal since the Schaefer era.

“Any redevelopment has to be accessible to the public and has to contribute to the economic base of this community,” adds Narr, a former president of the Dorchester County Chamber of Commerce.

Another milestone was cleared last summer when the University of Maryland Medical System announced plans to relocate its Shore Medical Center at Dorchester (formerly Dorchester General Hospital) to a new and more modern location on nearby Route 50. After the projected 2021 move, ownership of the hospital’s 14-acre footprint will be bundled with the adjacent 11.5-acre riverside tract that the city acquired from the Maryland Port Administration. “That [agreement] was the 50-yard line,” Narr says. “When the hospital property became available, that was a real game changer.”



In January 2009, the City of Cambridge hosted a series of public meetings under the banner theme “Cambridge Waterfront 2020” as part of the city’s process to update its Comprehensive Plan. Citizen input from those meetings led to the mixed use development concepts nearing fruition today.



Richard Ziedman, a part-time Cambridge resident and Montgomery County attorney specializing in public/private sector projects like this one, is one of the city’s two appointees to Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc. He points out another advantage of the waterfront initiative. Both the hospital property and the adjacent former state property fall within a designated federal Opportunity Zone.

Opportunity Zones are part of a community development program established by Congress in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. They provide tax incentives to spur long-term investments in low-income urban and rural communities nationwide.

“People are raising hundreds of millions of dollars to invest in these Opportunity Zones,” Ziedman explains. “The combination of the potential size of our project could very well attract significant Opportunity Zone-designated investment, which can only be a good thing for us.”

Ziedman says the Cambridge initiative has another leg up that’s so obvious, it’s often overlooked. It goes back to what the mayor likes to call the “Wow Factor.” “You’ve got six million people a year driving down Route 50 and it’s pretty hard to miss our waterfront,” Narr says. “And frankly, I think a lot of the people who are going to Ocean City are the kind of people who would

be interested in a place like Cambridge. It’s part of the complement of things that make us very attractive—a very spectacular waterfront with tremendous accessibility and visibility.”

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Founded in 1684, some of Cambridge’s earliest settlers raised tobacco and used slaves on their plantations. Slave auctions were held on the grounds of the county courthouse and Long Wharf was a regional hub for human trafficking. Harriet Tubman was born just a few miles from Cambridge. By the close of the 19th century, Cambridge was well on its way to becoming Maryland’s second largest and second



Cambridge Mayor Victoria Jackson Stanley was joined by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan and local dignitaries for the grand reopening and dedication of the redeveloped Cambridge Marine Terminal Wharf last July.

busiest port and a booming center of produce and seafood processing—everything from oysters and tuna fish to tomatoes and sweet potatoes.

Phillips Packing Company in particular grew to be one of the largest such operations on the Eastern Seaboard, employing upwards of 10,000 during the World War II years, when it and other local companies were awarded fat Department of Defense contracts to produce K-Rations and other goods for the fighting troops. Bumble Bee Tuna also had a large facility in Cambridge for years.

But by the 1960s, nearly all of that industry was gone, along with the thousands of jobs it had provided. In the years since, Cambridge has never fully recovered. As far back as 1992, a cadre of forward-looking citizens formed an advocacy group called the Committee of 100. Out of that emerged the nonprofit Sailwinds Park, Inc. “There was a realization that manufacturing was not going to come back and that we needed to look at new industries with a focus on tourism,” Narr recalls.

Finally, after all these years later, that incipient effort seems to be about to take form.

TIDES TURNING

Located adjacent to the target area is a tract owned by the Richardson Maritime Museum and its Ruark Boat Works, named after Harold Ruark, a revered Dorchester County boat builder. The museum, which currently has its

headquarters on nearby High Street, plans to consolidate its operations at the corner of Maryland and Hayward streets, and eventually open a maritime training school on the site.

Jane Devlin is executive director of the museum, which was founded in 1992. She says her organization has been part of the waterfront development effort since the early 1990s with its participation in the Committee of 100. Now that the revitalization finally seems imminent, Devlin welcomes it. She sees part of Richardson’s mission as enhancing the effort by helping preserve a portion of Cambridge’s “working waterfront.”

“The Richardson Museum promotes the past and the future, specifically with our [planned] trade school,” Devlin explains. “And what we, as neighboring sites [to the redevelopment] are doing will naturally enhance, and in turn, be enhanced by whatever goes on there.”

In retrospect, Devlin is glad that the earlier stand-alone efforts to revitalize the 11.5-acre former port site didn’t come to fruition. “They could have pulled the trigger on that 11 acres, but now to have a pad with 30 acres rather than just 11 really opens up the possibilities. We’re probably positioned for the best opportunity right now. It makes it a very interesting and exciting time in Cambridge.”

Ziedman says Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc.’s task between now and the hospital’s eventual relocation



is to “certify the outline of the property and analyze the effect on the tax base the redevelopment will have.”

Ziedman also notes the nonprofit will “facilitate the state, county, and city coming together to secure the necessary resources to get the [hospital] property into the kind of condition that a developer will be willing to finance and develop.”

Narr’s enthusiasm is tangible as he looks back over his more than 25 years as a redevelopment booster. “This an exciting opportunity and we only get one chance to do it right,” he says. “And there’s no question in my mind that if we do get it right, it will be looked back upon as the single most important initiative this community has ever done.”

Jackson-Stanley shares Narr’s sense of destiny. “Even if I’m not in office after this term or the next term, I will come to the ribbon cutting,” she says. “This is an outstanding opportunity for us to show that we are forward-thinking in the 21st century and beyond.”