For Janes, a ‘capstone job’

New head of Central Baltimore Partnership seeks to grow businesses, community

Ellen Janes has only been on the job as executive director of the Central Baltimore Partnership for little more than two weeks, taking over full time for her predecessor, Joseph McNeely, who retired in late June.

Janes, who previously handled community development initiatives for the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond and worked for Sen. Barbara Mikulski,

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Janes sees state-designated arts districts as 'national model'

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D-Md., takes over an organization almost immediately after promoting Baltimore's central neighborhoods at a critical juncture in the city's history.

Baltimore is dealing with a drastic spike in homicides following the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody and the resulting riots. But it's also a city that is growing in income, neighborhood development, with projects such as the $1 billion Waterfront at Canton Crossing and the new development at Harbor Point. Covington showing investors believe the city has room for growth.

"I'm in charge of directing the Central Baltimore Partnership as the nonprofit tries to help address a variety of issues, including public safety, developing truly inclusive neighborhoods and strengthening commercial districts," Janes said. "We have just an enormous community of committed, thoughtful people who are trying to make people believe whatever way they can," Janes said.

What follows is a condensed version of an interview conducted with Janes in The Daily Record's offices last week.

Tell me why you would want to come and fill this position after your previous jobs at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond and Sen. Mikulski's office (before that)?

"It's actually to me a capstone job. I am able to use the experience and the relationships and the knowledge that I've gained. When I first came to Baltimore, general counsel here from Washington D.C. — I headed a group called the Neighborhood Design Center, and that is very much a community-based organization where architects and other building industry professionals donate their time to community projects. I went from there 10 years ago to the state's neighborhood revitalization initiative under Gov. (Parris) Glendening, where we created a lot of the state resources that Central Baltimore Partners are using to revitalize their business funding. And the same group, called Community Legacy that makes public improvements. There's a tax credit that encourages agencies and businesses to donate their time and all those were created when I was with the state.

What does Baltimore need to do that it has not to encourage community revitalization?

I think, for one, I think we need to recognize the assets that we have and we need to promote them and we need to maximize them. For example... what we found around the country ... while the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond is that green space is very important to being able to attract not just new residents, but new businesses. And Baltimore is fortunate in the best park systems. Not everybody has a park system like we do... and yet I don't think everyone recognizes how valuable it is.

But, say, for example, in Minneapolis, they've used tiny parks that are hardly big enough for this city explosively to attract residents. The same thing in Washington D.C. — there's a really well-recognized that park space is very important and they don't have anything like the system that we have.

Another is, personally, and this hasn't been something the Central Baltimore Partnership has focused on specifically, but the way that other cities are growing very much has to do with attracting and supporting new immigrants.

The vibrancy that they can add in every way, culturally, socially, economically is remarkable. And we have great engineers here, Johns Hopkins, both the university and the hospital, the University of Maryland and others, that attract well-educated people from all over the world. But many of them are going to live in the suburbs [unless] we can make them feel welcome and provide for them and their families the things they are finding in the suburbs.

You mentioned previously that Central Baltimore has to work with everyone from Johns Hopkins and the University of Baltimore down to 10 different neighborhood groups, all while keeping business interests in mind. How do you see the role of Central Baltimore Partnership in coordinating all of these disparate organizations to try to promote that portion of the city?

One person described us as an aircraft controller. We're kind of the switchboard [but] maybe it's more than that. What we try to do is to support whatever way is needed the efforts of our partners. So, whether it's helping identify financial resources, helping to navigate through, say, permitting processes or other public approvals, bringing the right partners to the table to help flush those ideas out

ELLEN JANES

Age: 60

Current position: Janes is the newly appointed executive director of the Central Baltimore Partnership (CBP), an organization whose mission is to galvanize the revitalization of Central Baltimore. The CBP pursues its mission by partnering with neighborhood organizations, nonprofits, educational institutions, businesses and city government agencies. More than 90 organizations — including everyone from Joe Squared Pizza to the Greater West Community Association, to Johns Hopkins, to the Mayor's Office of Economic and Neighborhood Development — are CBP partners.

Background: Janes was previously (from 2008 to her appointment by CBP) a senior manager for community development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond's Baltimore branch, where she launched the CDI Roundtable with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the National Opportunity Finance Network. CDI investment in Baltimore has since tripled. She came to the Fed from the office of Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., which she joined in 2003 and was responsible for Instate projects and outreach activity. Prior to that she was Maryland DHCD Assistant Secretary for Neighborhood Revitalization in Gov. Parris Glendening's administration, where she oversaw introduction of the Neighborhood BusinessWorks, Community Investment Tax Credit, and Community Legacy programs. Janes' first job in Baltimore was as the executive director of the Neighborhood Development Center from 1989-1995.

Personal: Janes lives in Baltimore with her husband Steve and two children, Jenna and Max.

I think we need to recognize the assets that we have and we need to promote them and we need to maximize them," says Ellen Janes, executive director of the Central Baltimore Partnership.

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I know you've only been on the job for two weeks. But how would you describe the communication between businesses, residential and the Central Baltimore Partnership to establish what is needed to improve things,... the network that has been built. It's something that we're always growing and sustaining, but there is a number of tasks that the partnership supports directly. At the community association level there's a whole myriad of committees, E. C. (Executive Director) and other committees) the communication methods) uses social media to reach out.

What role do you see Station North [Arts & Entertainment District] playing in promoting what's already in Central Baltimore, but also more growth among businesses, here are there?

Another thought the Federal Reserve has actually recognized is the power of an arts district, of an arts community, to spur revitalization. I think that Station North, as well as the Highlandtown Arts District in East Baltimore, are actually national models on how effective that can be.

It communicates that something exciting is happening here. There's kind of something for everybody and the diversity of the arts district is kind of the key to its success.

There's all kinds of arts, and new performance spaces and restaurants coming in. And there are several hundred artists living in that district for years, under the radar. And to see that, their work flower the way it has the last few years is really remarkable.

As you can see, it couldn't be better for everyone for everyone in the city to be able to access it, it's very accessible for people coming in out of town, it's visible right from (Penca Station), the Metro stops. The Light Rail has been a great way of bringing people into the district.

So every which way it's I think it's communicating its vibrant, it's physically the center of the city, and it's I think anyone that any kind of person would feel welcome.