

DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP OF BALTIMORE

LIT CITY Baltimore: Dance Party in Preston Gardens Tunnel

In 2016, Downtown Partnership of Baltimore set its sights on Preston Gardens, a green space in Downtown Baltimore positioned between the upper and lower lanes of St. Paul Street, a major artery into the city. The space wasn't new to the organization, as we had previously been granted state and federal funds to upgrade the infrastructure and lighting in the area. With many projects underway, including new color-changing LED lights in the tunnel, the Marketing & Communications team brainstormed events that would engage and excite residents.

To understand the importance of Preston Gardens is to understand that it is in the fastest growing residential area of the city and is surrounded primarily by apartment buildings. According to Downtown Partnership's Housing Demand study, many of the apartment dwellers are new to Baltimore, so a strategic goal of our BID has been resident recruitment and retention. So much of our work revolves around answering the question- What keeps residents in Downtown?

Baltimore is home to renowned educational institutions including John Hopkins, University of Maryland, and Morgan State University, and is home to regional headquarters for T. Rowe Price, Morgan Stanley, Jellyfish, PANDORA, and Laureate. Educational and employment opportunities are helping to attract residents, and Downtown Partnership is helping to create and maintain a Downtown that meets and exceeds their residential needs. The Preston Gardens neighborhood is centrally located, just blocks from the famed Inner Harbor to the south and Penn Station to the north. It transit-connected with access to our bike share program, free Circulator bus, public transit, and great walkability.

The neighborhood lacked a destination or talking point and is often overlooked as the "Central Business District". We looked for an idea that would marry our need to create an anchor event in the neighborhood with something the residents would enjoy and participate in. Adding the color changing LED lights to the St. Paul Street tunnel had garnered a lot of social media buzz, so our ideation process began there. The tunnel provides built-in rain protection, so a large-scale outdoor event seemed logistically sound. We knew that Light City (a two-week festival of light and innovation happening just a few blocks south) was coming up, and we decided to create an event that would capitalize on the massive influx of people and excitement already created by the festival. With all these components in play, there was only one, glorious solution: We needed to host a four-hundred-person dance party inside the tunnel.

Partnerships were key to the success of the event, beginning with board-level support from Mercy Medical Center, the Garden's largest neighbor. The hospital was so supportive of the neighborhood activation and park enhancements that they offered free parking for attendees and additional security. (One man even came down for a quick toast after the birth of his baby earlier that day). The Baltimore City Department of Transit supported the event with free bike racks and road closure supplies, and Baltimore City Police were hired for overtime security. The nearby bars and restaurants that were

unable to join us on-site offered to help promote the event with flyers in windows, and some hosted LIT CITY drink specials before and after the party.

The party was a massive success. Our vendors (mainly local restaurants and Pixelated, a Baltimore-based photobooth company) were thrilled with the exposure. LIT CITY Baltimore met our goals – inclusivity, public space activation, and perception building. We had major residential buy-in as over half our ticket sales came from the zip code of the Preston Gardens neighborhood. This previously dark and ignored part of the park was bright and animated- a vision our party-goers were able to take with them and share. Though we feel it's our job to always ask "What keeps residents Downtown?", this event showed us that collaboration, creativity, and activation are three key aspects of residential retention.

The success of this event has led to its return this year, and we're hosting an additional 300 people and reaching out to even more community players. LIT City is proof that every nook and cranny of a Downtown is an opportunity for place making.

This project has become a good model for placemaking replication – it's financially self-sustainable, with ticket sales covering the full costs of the event and the marketing. While Downtown Partnership of Baltimore hosts tons of free events year-round, we felt that the offering was exciting enough that we could institute a modest all-inclusive ticket price of \$40. A night out in the City costs upwards of that. Feedback about the ticket price was supporting the local improvement district was great – people even wondered why we didn't charge more. With press and excited attendees, we now have interested sponsors, giving us more of an opportunity for partnerships and for keeping the event costs accessible. With limited resources this idea can be replicated in other downtown spaces – you just need a little space, a few engaged partners, understanding of the permit process, and a whole lot of glow sticks.

Marketing Plan:

- Flyers distributed to apartment buildings and neighborhood retailers
- Facebook event aggregation
- Eventbrite ticket platform
- Social media influencer marketing with ticket giveaway incentives
- Targeted email campaign aimed at city residents, ages 21-45
- Full page ad in Baltimore Magazine, online banner ads, and bi-weekly email ads (utilized an existing ad buy)
- Press pitching to local entertainment editors and TV news producers. [Example 1](#) & [Example 2](#)

Check out LIT CITY wrap-up video:

<http://www.godowntownbaltimore.com/library/LitCityInstagramvideo.mp4>