



Contact: Megan McCormack
Mobile: 443-797-2245
megan@sagesseinc.com

Belair-Edison Neighborhoods, Inc. Hires New Executive Director to Lead Organization

Will Smith tapped to continue 28-year legacy of revitalizing the community

Baltimore, Md. (July 19, 2019) — The Belair-Edison Neighborhoods, Inc. (BENI) Board of Directors announces Will Smith as the organization's new Executive Director. Beginning his tenure at BENI in 2013, Smith built upon his neighborhood revitalization experience while continuing to transform Belair-Edison into a healthy community where residents and local businesses can thrive.

"After an extensive search for a new executive director, we determined that the best candidate was already a member of the BENI family," stated Tanya R. Dorsey, President of the Board of Directors. "Will has been a true asset to Belair-Edison, bringing a wealth of knowledge of both the organization and the community, building upon decades of successes throughout the neighborhood."

Smith joined BENI as the Community Engagement Specialist and has grown throughout his tenure to also serve as Main Streets Director, Schools Liaison and most recently Community Development Manager.

Born and raised in Baltimore City, he brings 20 years of experience in the private and non-profit sectors to the organization. He has been a partner in several small business ventures, including a convenience store and a landscaping company. With his "Will-Talk" radio show on WOLB-AM, Smith gave a platform to budding entrepreneurs, business owners, community activists and community-based organizations to help facilitate increased engagement throughout the city.

"I am honored to be selected to continue to build upon the long legacy of success of BENI" said Will Smith, Executive Director, Belair-Edison Neighborhoods Inc. "We have created a great deal of positive momentum in the last several years along our Main Street corridors, with residents and our community art installations, creating homebuyer incentives and building stronger relationships in the real estate industry and I look forward to expanding this work."

In 2017 Smith was awarded the Mayors Community Engagement Citation and the Community Champion Award from the Belair Edison Community Association, as well as many other City Citations.

Located in the heart of northeast Baltimore City, Belair-Edison features an abundance of accessible green-space with the adjacent 300-acre Herring Run and Clifton Parks - offering a diverse, welcoming and family-friendly neighborhood experience. With its picturesque front-porch rowhomes and premier location, just a 15-minute commute to downtown and minutes to major highways, Belair-Edison is a growing neighborhood of choice.

Smith will lead a staff of 11 people and oversee just under a \$1M annual operating budget in a community of 18,000 residents. He has developed and grown several relationships with key stakeholders, as well as the community, and will continue to expand upon these critical partnerships.



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A partnership with St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center began with combating block-busting and predatory lending in the community the late 1980's. That work has translated into a highly successful program where over 200 homes have been acquired and renovated by St. Ambrose and sold to new home buyers throughout the Belair-Edison neighborhood.

"The Belair-Edison neighborhood is vital to the overall health and future of our City," said Gerard Joab, Executive Director, St Ambrose Housing Aid Center, "and we are proud to be part of the continued renaissance of this community and partner with BENI, delivering regional and national resources to support community development priorities."

High-impact work through the community will continue under Smith's leadership. BENI is acquiring a property on Belair Road that was heavily damaged by fire several years ago and has been an eyesore to the Main Street corridor since, they will be working with a development partner on the much-needed renovations.

The work of BENI is supported through a variety of partnerships with organizations like Healthy Neighborhoods and Baltimore City Main Streets programs, as well as various lending institutions. Funding sources include Meyerhoff, Goldseker, and Abell Foundations. BENI has also been a multi-year recipient of Baltimore Regional Neighborhood Initiative funding from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

The organization was previously led by Johnette Richardson, who resigned in January 2019.

About Belair-Edison Neighborhoods, Inc. (BENI)

Belair-Edison Neighborhoods, Inc. (BENI) is a nonprofit community-based organization that works to foster an environment where residents, business owners, and stakeholders feel confident to invest their time, energy and money. We are a Healthy Neighborhoods and Baltimore Main Streets partner organization, as well as a HUD certified comprehensive housing counseling agency, serving Baltimore City and County homebuyers. Founded in 1991, we have been offering a variety of neighborhood services for decades - including community organizing, homeownership counseling, small business development, asset promotion and school support services.

More information at the BENI websites <http://www.BelairEdison.city> and <http://www.belair-edison.org>.

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