

Graduation profile: Calvert Hall graduate already adept at urban planning

After a visit to New York's famous High Line, a public park built atop a former freight rail line in Manhattan,

Matthew Kearney began imagining ways Baltimore could replicate the project.

Why not take unused space in the city, the Calvert Hall College High School student wondered, and transform it into a popular go-to spot?

Kearney went to Google maps to find empty space.

"To the left of the Inner Harbor, there's this big, green empty thing," said Kearney, a 17-year-old parishioner of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland who graduated from Calvert Hall this spring as valedictorian and who will attend the University of Notre Dame in Indiana in the fall.

The under-used space was near West Baltimore's infamous "highway to nowhere," a never-completed transportation project that upended whole neighborhoods. Also in the vicinity was a 1.1-million-square foot former Social Security Administration building that had become an eyesore.

As a capstone project for Calvert Hall's McMullen Scholars Program, Kearney developed a proposal to establish an urban greenway as a component of redevelopment of Metro West. He shared his ideas with Caves Valley Partners, a firm that is working to redevelop the Social Security site. There's a good chance Kearney's proposal could become a reality.

"How crazy would that be?" he said, noting that little had come from similar proposals.

Thinking big and working hard typify Kearney, who was an intern for a White House

initiative to implement Smart City Partnerships between city governments and universities in 34 cities.

At Calvert Hall, he was involved in the Model United Nations, the It's Academic television quiz show, the Student Council Executive Board, peer education and more.

Kearney played tennis and squash, serving as the No. 1 player and team captain on the squash team. He volunteered with the Loaves and Fishes program at the cathedral, making lunches for homeless people and helping deliver them to people on the street.

"It opened me up to see that they are just regular people and we're just regular people," he said.

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