

LOCAL NEWS

# This Park Heights developer is bringing her neighbors a safe place to land



Nicole Earle, CEO of Dominion Real Estate, stands in the vacant lot on the 4500 block of Park Heights Avenue on which her company is building 50 units of affordable housing. (Barbara Haddock Taylor/Staff)



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Earle, 52, is a resident of the Park Heights neighborhood, an area that leaders say is on the rise after years of neglect. Last year, she purchased the approximately 11,800 square feet between 4405 and 4411 Park Heights Ave., a parcel Earle and others in Park Heights said sat vacant for years, for \$158,000.

“The big part about what I’m doing is that I live here,” said Earle, who grew up in Jamaica and moved to Maryland in 1994. “I’m not somebody who’s just come in as an investor, but I am invested because I live here.”

Earle describes herself as an “impact investment developer” and is the CEO of Dominion Real Estate, a firm she started to “build sustainable and thriving communities.” With this recent purchase, Earle is set to develop the Abe Dua Residences, a six-floor building that will have both residential and commercial uses — Earle is hoping a bank will take the ground floor commercial spot — with a five-story brick facade meant to mirror historic Baltimore rowhouses.



There will be studios as well as one-, two- and three-bedroom

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Earle plans to have 50 affordable housing units at the complex, all reserved for households making 20% to 60% of area median income. In Baltimore City, families of four making 60% of the area median income earn about \$67,000, according to 2023 income and rent limits published by the state.

To fund the \$22.8 million endeavor, Earle is combining money from state and city funds, tax credits and bank loans, with plans to apply for more government money and foundation grants.

“Place matters. It’s an anchor,” Earle said. “So first, you have to give people a stable home to live in. Then you have to have the right services, and you have to have the right amenities, and you have to educate and train.”

Offering community services is a priority for Earle in her new project, with construction expected to begin at the end of 2025. Earle said she wants to provide residents with access to health services, financial literacy skills and job training.

Even before construction gets underway, Earle plans to clean up the lot and use it for outdoor events. And she wants to partner with a construction job training program to get residents ready for the jobs the housing complex is expected to generate.

“I think that it’s important for people in the neighborhood to be a part of the solution,” said Earle, who is Afro-Caribbean-American. “A lot of the people in the affordable housing space, in the commercial development space, don’t look like me. And so I think that it’s important to have representation of people who look like you to be a part of the solution.”

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Once Abe Dua opens, Earle wants to give young people in particular spaces where they can use “what they love already as a base to help them to find an opportunity to do something productive.”

In that spirit, she’s partnering with Marvin McDowell, founder of Umar Boxing in Druid Heights, to bring the boxing program to Abe Dua. Since 1996, McDowell has combined education and boxing under his gym’s roof, with mottos like “No hooks before books” and “Put the guns down, put the gloves up.”

Earle has found support for her plan in Park Heights Renaissance, which focuses on empowering the Park Heights Community and driving investment in the area. CEO Yolanda Jiggetts said the organization supports only projects that have buy-in from the community, which Earle has gathered as a long-term resident.

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Jiggetts said she sees Earle as the right person to implement an ambitious plan in Park Heights, which is “recovering from years of disinvestment.” Earle, who said she is a graduate of the University at Albany and Carnegie Mellon University, has spent her career in affordable housing, community development and finance, all experience that she intends to bring to Park Heights.

“She aligns with what we really are looking for as a conscious community development model,” Jiggetts said. “There must be community involvement and community benefit in every project.”

Jiggetts said Park Heights Renaissance and the coalition of developers it has gathered have spent the past few years making a slate of projects like Earle’s possible. For example, Baltimore-based Henson Development Co. and New York-based The NHP Foundation are building rental town houses and low-rise apartments with retail in the 4600 and 4800 blocks of Park Heights Avenue in addition to a 100-unit apartment building for seniors across the street.

City Councilwoman Sharon Green Middleton, who represents Park Heights, said she’s seen Earle engage with neighbors while pursuing this housing complex. She is supportive of this newest venture and Earle.

“I’m really excited because it’s something that’s needed and the people that want to move into this facility, they’re going to be able to get those wraparound services right there,” Middleton said. “It’s going to be a very special place that I can say, at least in my district, there’s no housing like this.”

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*This article is part of our Newsmaker series, which profiles notable people in the Baltimore region who are having an impact in our diverse communities. If you'd like to suggest someone who should be profiled, please send their name and a short description of what they are doing to make a difference to: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Editor Kamau High at [khigh@baltsun.com](mailto:khigh@baltsun.com).*

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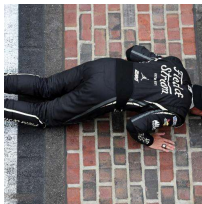
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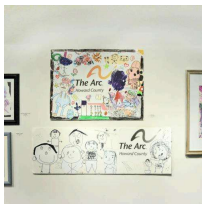
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