National Aquarium Strategic Master Plan

The National Aquarium sought out Studio Gang to help them update the aquarium model for the future.

The Strategic Master Plan identifies opportunities for sustainable growth, improves the visitor experience, and reinforces the organization’s commitment to conservation and education at every scale.

At the urban scale, the plan suggests connecting the Aquarium’s current facilities, separated by a former ship slip in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, with an urban wetland.

By providing outdoor educational and social spaces for visitors and the public, the plan simultaneously improves the local ecology, creates a campus identity, strengthens connectivity, and extends the Aquarium’s growing conservation work in the region.
Conceptual rendering of proposed architectural interventions with the urban wetland at the center. The design of the urban wetland is based on the geometry of Chesapeake Bay tidal meanders.

Conceptual rendering. Attracting wildlife and increasing biodiversity, the urban wetland offers a new physical center for the National Aquarium campus.

Inside the building complex, the plan calls for a redesigned
circulation sequence to enhance visitor flow through the exhibits and visitor amenities. The plan also creates and enriches spaces for education through a new unifying concept for the exhibits on both piers: while Pier 3 would offer an expansive tour of global “Hope Spots,” treasured places on the planet that are worth protecting, Pier 4 would become the domain of the region’s spectacular natural asset, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Coordinating the architectural experience with the exhibits and education spaces, the design takes visitors on a journey through the various ecological zones of the Chesapeake watershed, the United States’ largest estuary and among the most fragile. Educational labs and classrooms are integrated within both interior and exterior exhibits and reveal back-of-house functions like the fish kitchen. New program areas become intimately tied to the Aquarium’s conservation work.
Pier 4 becomes the domain of the region’s spectacular natural asset, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Conceptual rendering. A hub-like space within the Chesapeake exhibit on Pier 4 provides a lounge space in which to relax and engage with the exhibit’s local ecology. Exhibit developed in collaboration with Thinc Design.
Conceptual rendering. The proposed Pier 4 addition unites existing and new building volumes. Visitors arriving from Pier 3 walk toward a covered entrance with views of a theater, restaurant, and the Pier 4 exhibit.