



Photography by Mitro Hood

Mapmaker: Designer and urban planner Janet Felsten charts the city's eco-charms.

Everything in its Place

Janet Felsten is all too aware of the map many people use to take the measure of Baltimore: the homicide map on the Baltimore Sun website that documents exactly where the bodies have been found. Felsten, an insistent positive designer and urban planner, is not a fan of this grim cartography. “Why should that map be the signature image of Baltimore?” she asked in a blog post on the Open Society Institute-Baltimore website last year. Over the past eight years, Felsten has been patiently developing an upbeat alternative: the Baltimore Green Map, a collaborative effort to document the city’s eco-assets, from hiking and bird-watching spots to community gardens and vegetarian restaurants. “Maps are a tool for people to figure out what they’ve got and what they want,” Felsten says. She hopes that her map will inspire people to make the city a greener place.

Making a good map is a deceptively tricky undertaking, Felsten says. In the early stages of the project, she worked with a Maryland Institute College of Art class that experimented with where and how best to present the streets, icons, and other information. That was in 2002. Six years later, with help from the Jones Falls Watershed Association and the city Recreation and Parks Department, she managed to get the first map printed. It charts the Jones Falls watershed and includes a detailed inlay of Druid Hill Park.

Felsten has also created an online map (www.baltimoregreenmap.org) with tools provided by the nonprofit Green Map System, founded by eco-designer Wendy Brawer, who created the first-of-its-kind Green Apple Map of New York City in 1992. The Baltimore map, powered by Google, went live online last April and continues to evolve: As of early March, users have added close to 300 sites. All of the pinpointed sites are categorized into “sustainable living,” “nature,” or “culture and society,” and are marked by icons that allow you to discern, at a glance, the difference between, say, a bus stop and a bike shop. This system of icons, developed by an international team of professional and citizen mappers, is now used in more than 350 green maps from Barcelona to Yellowknife, British Columbia.

Down the road, Felsten envisions neighborhood-scale maps of communities such as Waverly and Reservoir Hill, and more collaborations with colleges and even elementary schools. For those who are getting used to learning about their surroundings by jiggling their iPhones, the folks in New York are working on a mobile-device gizmo. Still, Felsten says, “There will always be a place for maps.”

—Greg Hanscom

