

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: June 22, 2023

Meeting #79

Project: Rash Field Phase #2

Phase: Schematic

Location: Inner Harbor

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Laurie Schwartz introduced the project and project team and shared that Phase 1 completed in the fall of 2021 has been a remarkable success with a large number of visitors for every corner of the city and nation. She then introduced the designers at Mahan Rykiel.

Michael Humes of Mahan Rykiel began presenting the updated design by sharing the community outreach for Phase 2. This captured changes in how people think about outdoor public spaces post-pandemic. Community outreach showed large support for shade structures, ample seating, greenery, and flexible spaces for all Baltimore residents.

The property includes a large grade change from +23' at the south end of the site where it meets Phase 1 and +7' along the promenade. The proposal will drape the topography throughout the site vs. the use of retaining walls – this helps create universal access throughout the site. The program includes a wide variety of activities including the return of beach volley ball and the Pride of Baltimore memorial, as well as new elements such as a fitness area, lawn and garden walk.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the clear and thorough presentation and shared excitement for the completed phase. The Panel then moved into clarifying questions and comments.

Clarification:

- *Curious to know if you have considered shifting the programming to relate to the water more? Did you explore an option that located more of the beach closer to the water? We did place the family beach area as close to the water as possible. Some of the challenges are the competing programmatic elements that need to be placed along the promenade.*
- *Can you explain how the spaces will be truly flexible spaces? The beach volleyball courts will have removable poles and nets, though they will be primarily used for beach volleyball, the family beach space will be primarily for alternative beach uses, with the potential for volleyball during tournaments.*
- *Are there floating wetlands in the harbor? We added them to the rendering, but are not currently part of the project – we hope that they will be created eventually.*

- *Can you walk us through the different ecologies that will be represented in the park? We're not quite at that level of design, but we hope to really show the variety found within Maryland, ranging from woodland garden, pollinator garden, to bay-scaping.*
- *Have you provided seating along the promenade edge? We have provided some seating, it's not visible at this scale. Throughout the park we will have zones that will include shaded swings and terrace steps. We will definitely include additional opportunities for rest and respite along the promenade.*
- *There are limited points where one can cross Key Highway to access the promenade. Do you have any thoughts on providing additional access? Yes, currently in Phase 1 we have markers delineating the access points and we will need to place significant way finding markers at the various access points around the park.*
- *You mentioned the Pride of Baltimore; can you speak to how the memorial is paying homage to its heritage and what its intending to do here? We've engaged with the Pride committees on their memorial and understand that they're willing to relocate and reorient the memorial. In speaking with them the memorial should also be an interpretive monument that explains what the Pride is. When the Pride of Baltimore II comes to the city we would like it to have a permanent home near the site to create a visual connection with the memorial.*
- *Have you considered that the Pride memorial be located within the Shade Lawn or another part of the programming? We haven't, but we can consider that.*

COMMENTS:

Site:

- Very exciting and beautifully designed park that successfully maintains design continuity with Phase 1. Appreciate all the vision and intention that has gone into this design.
- Make sure that the park is designed with plenty of room to breathe and that it isn't over programmed. As you're refining this design, continue to check the sense of scale and space so the park doesn't become overwhelmed.
- Supportive of the use of topography vs. a constructed edge, this is much more effective in allowing you to create unique experiences and special elements throughout the park.
- The ADA permeability is great, make sure universal access is maintained as the design develops, as it is so critical to creating a public park where everyone feels welcome.
- At the beach, understand that the program adjacencies are driving the location, however there is an opportunity with this completely man-made location to create bio-mimicry – there's a natural progression that one would consider from the hill to the lowland – the higher elevation and garden wall to the beach. If you're emulating the Maryland ecologies, they should model the reality of what's here.
- Would love to see the floating wetlands.
- The edge along the promenade needs to be more intentional. Currently the programming along the promenade is generally in invitation into the park. Consider creating spaces here that are more natural and free-flowing, a more seamless edge. Needs to be a little more seamless along the edge, as there's a lot of movement that occurs there. This begins by providing seating along the promenade looking out to the water and city beyond.
- Along Key Highway, those entry points need to be more developed, don't rely too much on wayfinding or pylons. Consider how can the entry points be sculpted in the landscape – if you're meeting someone there or recovering from some exercise is there a place to sit and stretch –

enhance the entry and exit nodes to announce that the park is not only here, but this is how you enter.

- What the overarching or unifying theme of the park? How can you connect all the various programs and spaces to create a cohesive experience that connects the entire site? Relatedly, there's a lot of program stitched together by pathways – maybe the refinements can be in the transition between the various spaces.
- Related to the Pride, I think it's important to integrate the memorial into the site. Reconsider its location – if it is intended to be a reflective space should it be located away from the activity to allow for the contemplative needs of those who visit?
- The proposal is a large departure from the previous designs that centered the beach and included linear elements along the promenade, resulting in a more interesting design, however, perhaps some of these previous elements can help to create consistency within the park, a layer of continuity that connects the entire park.
- Consider mirroring the beach, with the wider side closer to the water, or if the pride gets relocated, then some of that space can be utilized – can imagine that the users of the beach would appreciate the view of water as close as possible.
- Realign some of the paths, they feel like they're pushing into the programmed spaces. Maybe there's too much efficiency.
- Can some of the programming along the edge be pulled deeper into the site to allow the water's edge to breathe?
- Urge you to create more park or green space – a sense of nature that isn't limited to the intimate garden walk area. Will the paths be comfortable to traverse on hot days? Consider more greenery and shade trees along the paths, creating an allee - could this be that defining elements?
- There is a sense the someone could easily get lost along the paths, which meander through the site. Need more intuitive paths, so that people won't need to rely on wayfinding signage, but can easily understand the organization of the park. Perhaps one element directly connects the various programs more directly? A major spine that clearly shows how you navigate the park generally.
- Super excited to see this come to life, our comments are all refinements.

Next Steps:

Continue working with Planning staff to address the panel's comments prior to returning to UDAAP.

Attending:

Laurie Schwartz, Marco Greenberg – Waterfront Partnership

Michael Humes, Scott Rykiel – Mahan Rykiel

Brandon Brooks, Ed Gunts, Morgan Simpson, Steven Robinson, Nancy Mead - Attendees

Anthony Osbourne, Sharon Bradley and Pavlina Ilieva* - UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette**, Matt DeSantis, Eric Tiso - Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff