

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

Date: May 14, 2015 **Meeting No.:** 204

Project: 500 Park Avenue **Phase:** Schematic

Location: Park Avenue and West Franklin Street

PRESENTATION:

Mr. Dominick Wicker, Development Director for Time Group; introduced the project to the Panel. As described, the project represents the Phase II development piece of the successful 520 Park Avenue residential conversion project. Mr. Wicker indicated that the program for 500 Park will include 150 residential units, 60 structured parking spaces and a small ground level retail component.

Mr. Charles Alexander, Principal with Alexander Design Studio, identified the design components of the project. They include a six story “L” shaped residential building along West Franklin, a two story retail and amenity pavilion situated on Park and directly on axis to Hamilton Street; and, a bio-retention green space visible from Park Avenue. Mr. Alexander noted that entrance to the residential component is at the corner of Park and West Franklin.

Design features described include a “multi folded” ground level facade along Park Avenue, a five story vertical blade sign at the corner of Park and West Franklin and a sculptured second level exterior pedestrian bridge connecting residents to the amenity deck above the retail pavilion. Exterior materials proposed include glass, cementitious panels and rain screen panels.

PANEL COMMENTS:

The Panel accepted the massing and placement of the six story residential block and the strategic location of the two story retail/amenity pavilion on axis to Hamilton Street. The residential entrance at the corner of Park and West Franklin and garage/parking lot access off of West Franklin seemed logical. The Panel complimented the Architect on utilizing the grade of the site to screen a majority of the structure parking thus allowing for active ground level uses along Park Avenue.

The Panel had concerns with the design approach advanced by the Architect, which can be best defined as “de-constructivism.” It was noted that this approach is characterized by fragmentation and a purposeful manipulation of a structure’s surface skin in order to distort, dislocate and disorient elements of architecture in a non-traditional manor.

The Panel expressed concern that this stylist approach is best described visually as “controlled chaos.”

Panel members questioned the validity of this approach in the context of Mount Vernon, a renowned historic urban residential neighborhood. The Panel posited that the most “notable” de-constructivism project like Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum or Libeskind’s Denver Museum, are civic object buildings, not urban residential projects.

Although the Panel questioned the de-constructivist design approach, they expressed both an openness and preference to a contemporary design solution which would be sensitive to both context and urban design.

Given the current proposed design, the Panel raised the following concerns:

STREETSCAPE AND PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE:

- 1.) The multiple folded planes, the shifting wall panel grid along Park, the lack of a clearly defined residential entry and the confusion over the degree of public access to the open space along Park contributed to a potential sense of discomfort and confusion for pedestrians, in a neighborhood widely acknowledged as walkable and pedestrian friendly.
- 2.) The mounded landscaped bio-retention space directly accessible from the public sidewalk appeared to be in sharp conflict with the Architect’s stated intention to preserve this space as private. To better serve the residents the adjacent retail patrons and passing pedestrians it was suggested by the Panel that this space would be better served as a public plaza or clearly defined as a private space with clear edges.
- 3.) The randomly located horizontal strip lighting on the first floor façade facing West Franklin was viewed as a potential nighttime distraction to both pedestrian and motorists.
- 4.) The large five story tall vertical project blade sign at the corner of Park Avenue and West Franklin Street appeared overly “commercial” and out of scale, particularly given the understated and somewhat hidden residential entrance directly below the sign. The Panel encouraged the Design Team to reduce the prominence of the vertical sign element and increase the importance and visibility of the street level entrance.

ARCHITECTURE:

- 1.) For a residential project, the small amount of windows seemed troubling in the context of the most recent residential projects reviewed by UDARP and in comparison to the large expansive windows in the 520 Park Avenue project. The Panel felt the limited amount of windows along the West Franklin Street and Park

Avenue facades was unfortunate. The size, shape and spacing of windows along these two prominent streets suggested a “casual stay hotel” verses a contemporary, market driven residential project.

- 2.) Panel members questioned the use of EIFs panels as the dominant exterior material. They noted that these panels are typically flat, lack depth or texture. The Panel also questioned the size of the “interlocking” panels.
- 3.) To help relieve the massing on West Franklin there appeared to be several recessed balconies shown on a typical floor plan but eliminated on the West Franklin façade. The Panel urged the Design Team to reinstate these vertically lined recessed balconies as a means to break up the mass and provide some “visual order”. Similarly the balconies identified in plan at the north and south corner of the Park Ave side of the building could be more celebratory, serve as a form giver, and become a more positive asset to the residents.

PANEL ACTION:

Recommend Approval with above comments to be explored and addressed at the next phase.

Attending:

Bob Rosenfelt, Carla Ryon – CMR Inc.
Mark Caplan, Dominick Wicker – The Time Group
Scott Hoot – RSLA
Natalie Sherman – Baltimore Sun
Michael Hunter
Gail Desch-Jones – BC Parking
Prakash Mistry – BC DPW
Russ Gordon, A. Rod Womack – WBDC
Chris Harvey – HCM
Charles Alexander – Alexander Design Studio

Dr. Meany, Messrs. Bowden and Burns* - UDARP Panel

Director Tom Stosur, Anthony Cataldo, Wolde Ararsa, Caitlin Audette –Planning Dept