

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

Date: March 24, 2016

Meeting No.: 223

Project: Graceland Park and Holabird Elementary/
Middle Schools

Phase: Discussion

Location: Cardiff Avenue and O'Donnell Streets

PRESENTATION:

Ms. Amy Upton, Architect with Grimm and Parker, presented the prototype design developed for both Graceland Park and Holabird Elementary/Middle Schools. The program, size, floor plan, massing and exterior design for both schools will be identical. Placement of the prototype and surrounding site development will be modified to respond to the unique particulars of each site. It is the Architect's intent that each school's identity will be established by the employment of distinguishing site features and civic gestures.

Both schools will be constructed while the existing schools remain open and in operation. The Graceland Park Elementary/Middle School will be constructed along O'Donnell Street and east of the existing school. Once demolished, the site for the existing school will accommodate parking, playground and recreation fields. The Holabird Elementary/Middle School will be constructed along Cardiff Avenue west of the existing school. Like the Graceland Park School, the existing Holabird School will be demolished and the site will accommodate parking, playground and recreation fields.

In addition to the differences in the development and landscape of the sites, the Architect intends each prototype to appear different thru the use of color, graphics and unique entry canopy features. Graceland Park School will be participating in the Maryland Net Zero Energy Schools Program and will use renewable energy sources, like rooftop solar panels, which will further distinguish it from Holabird.

PANEL COMMENTS:

The Panel was appreciative of the Architect's comprehensive presentation and thoughtful analysis of program, site constraints and opportunities. In general, the Panel understood the logic of developing a single prototype design for both sites, but questioned if different site conditions would not lead the Architect to modify components of the prototype to be more site specific and less "design dogmatic". Does the "purity" of the prototype overrule or ignore site and contextual conditions unique to each school site?

The larger issue posited by the Panel had to do with the need for the prototype design to be “malleable” and the allowance of the site to inform the design of the prototype.

Comments specific to both schools:

- The Panel felt the main entry was remote and visually obscure on both school sites and suggested the Architect rework the plan to make the main entry more accessible and prominent from both Cardiff Avenue and O’Donnell Street. Locating the main entry closer to the streets was viewed as desirable.
- The Panel questioned the visibility of the community entrance from both site entry points. The community entrance seemed secondary and hidden or “tucked” around the corner. The Panel encouraged the Architect to reconfigure the plan, possibly reorienting the gymnasium to a north/south axis; to make the community entry point more prominent and engaged with the site entry plazas.
- Although acknowledged by the Architect as an important consideration and influence, the Panel felt the recognition of the “School Street” axis was underplayed. In particular, the “off axis” placement of the Graceland Park School and lack of a strong site marker offered no visual terminus.

Comments specific to Graceland Park School:

- The Panel was concerned about the grade difference upon entering the site from O’Donnell Street and suggested regrading could eliminate steps down into the site.
- The curvilinear nature of the sidewalks proposed offered a nice counterpoint to the rigid geometry of the building, but the Panel felt a stronger gesture at the main entry was required to signify the importance of entry along the curving pathway.
- The lack of a strong civic gesture signifying the northern terminus of the “School Street” was of concern to the Panel and they suggested that the canopy structure could be relocated and or a vertical site feature incorporated to serve as an urban design terminus.

Comments specific to Holabird School:

- The Panel felt the strong diagonal entry sidewalk terminating into the corner of the school was problematic. Described by the Architect as a “linear plaza”, the Panel felt this element was more directional as a route then static as a place.
- To signify the importance of the main entry, the Panel suggested that the diagonal sidewalk or “linear plaza” terminate at this point.

PANEL ACTION:

Discussion only.

Attending:

Amy Upton, Kat Schooley, Melissa Wilfong, Linda Clark – Grimm + Parker Arch.

Steve Broache, Bronwyn Phillips – City Schools

Steve Lauria – SPA – Land Arch

Messrs. Bowden, Haresign, Burns*, and Ms. Ilieva - UDARP Panel

Anthony Cataldo, Carmen Morosan, Wolde Ararsa, – Planning Department