

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

Date: June 24, 2017

Meeting No.: 242

Project: New Lexington Market

Phase: Discussion

Location: West Lexington between Eutaw Street and North Paca Street

PRESENTATION:

This presentation of the New Lexington Market proposal was a Discussion between the building architects, Murphy & Dittenhafer, the landscape architect, Floura Teeter, and the UDARP panel. For reference, architect Frank Dittenhafer presented the project context, architect Todd Grove described the details of the plan, and landscape architect Alice Storm Jones presented the public open space immediately adjacent to the proposed new structure.

In an effort to familiarize the panel with the undertaking and the current conditions, Mr. Dittenhafer and Mr. Grove described the site context, the position of the market interrupting the ascent of West Lexington Street, the relationship of the market to the adjacent neighborhood, as well as the dark and sloping interiors of the existing building. There is 18' of fall across the site, from Paca to Eutaw, accounting for the challenging interior grade condition of the existing structure. The initial studies of the market determined that renovation of the existing structure was not feasible; the proposal is for an entirely new structure to the south where an existing at-grade parking lot presently stands.

Mr. Grove continued the presentation with an introduction to the new facility, to be situated on the southern portion of the site, acknowledging the challenges and aspirations of redefining the market as a two-level experience, focusing both on Eutaw AND Paca. He reviewed the floor plans citing, in particular, the connections to adjacent conditions and the challenges in doing so. The façade of the new facility facing a proposed urban park sits proud of the adjacent Lexington Street facades. The market's support services are from Marion Street, between Eutaw and Paca.

Ms. Storm Jones acknowledged the position of the market site within the urban fabric and the proximity to Center Plaza at the eastern end of Lexington Street. The market location mandates that the street and sidewalk conditions reflect the West Side/University Center guidelines. Ms. Storm Jones described the aspirations and programming opportunities contained within the design of the proposed new urban park to the north of the new market site. Informed by the North Paca Street interior elevation (the Level One floorplan of the market), "grand stairs" rise from the Eutaw Street elevation to meet the grade of Level One in the center of the proposed new Lexington Street corridor. At this same elevation, an outdoor Farmer's Market Pavilion allows trucks to pull off of Paca to vend under the structure's permanent canopy. From this elevation, the park landscape descends via a long sloping plane at the northwest side diagonally to the base of the Grand Stairs and North Eutaw Street. This allows for Terraced Seating and an Open Lawn

for flexible programming opportunities. “Crushed gravel + bosque planting” steps down along Eutaw for stormwater collection and management.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

Ideally, this presentation would begin with an understanding of the design team’s explorations of other, similar venues – of urban markets successfully revived, of topographically-challenged structures and how they’ve overcome multi-level entrances and egresses, of civic spaces embraced or embracing important venues. Similarly, explorations and diagrams acknowledging “the big idea” – the bold intent – would assist the Panel in understanding and evaluating how and why design ideas are expressed as they are. These might include massing studies of both architecture and open space. Having both building and landscape defined within a common drawing, or street names and other identifiers included on the drawings aides in the ease of assessing the effort to date.

The discussion that followed the overall presentation focused on challenges to the creation of a new market, rather than refurbishment of the old market. The designers acknowledged that refurbishment, although the original intent, proved too costly. The approach to the market upgrade quickly became a “start from scratch” approach. In order to continue to occupy the market while construction ensues, the proposal is to build the new market within the boundaries of the southern parking lot, removing the existing market only when the new market is occupied.

Chief among the concerns from the Panel, is the physical position of the new structure (and the adjacent open space) relative to the topography of the Westside neighborhood. This market is at the physical peak of the hill and a beacon to the neighborhood and City. In the present configuration, the north façade is not held back to align with the other facades along Lexington. While it is appropriate to release Lexington into a pedestrian thoroughway, once more, the civic space should be positioned to receive the citizens of Baltimore and their friends, not any aspect of the structure itself. This was the mistake of the 1980’s addition, and it should not be duplicated, even with the slight intrusion of the new market façade. It is aspirational that people should ascend to a civic space, then enter the market.

In keeping with this notion, once the market façade is pulled back, it would be better to have the exterior pavilion abut the remnant garage to the north. In doing so, both the new market and the new pavilion will frame a grand public space, allowing for programming to be central in the experience of the site. This gesture will also allow the topography to wrap the public space, descending toward North Eutaw. It also allows trucks serving the pavilion to use the garage to offload goods, rather than have them intrude and enter the public space off of North Paca. In the landscape’s present configuration, the resultant spaces are awkwardly arranged, too equal in size and not at all distinct in character. It would be better to amalgam these disparate spaces into one or two areas that can receive participants more effectively.

In the present configuration, the “monumental” stairs are not heraldic nor civic enough to be called so. Creating stairs that graciously allow citizens to ascend/descend should also promote gathering through sitting, and opportunities for people-watching. Stair configurations should be scaled, as such, with risers and treads in a 5:15 ratio. In the proposed design, those stairs might wrap around and make redundant the proposed central planter identified in the site plan.

For the limited amount of programming defined within the public space, there seems to be a preponderance of paving. Be strategic with paving. Although within an urban context, perhaps there is greater opportunity for relief. Diagram potential programming opportunities and use these to redefine the extent of “green” vs “paved.”

Just as the open space is about equity and accessibility, so too should the market be. The small entry on Eutaw isn't successful due to lack of scale. And the apertures are limited. Is there a means of making the glazing open with greater significance along the street facades (Paca and Eutaw)? In its present guise, the market seems to favor Paca. And what is perceived to be the main entrance – the doorway at the “monumental stairs” facing the park – doesn't receive market-goers into a volume of significance. There is no ceremonial arrival point. How can this be achieved? Is there a means of creating a central gathering space for those dining at the market, as opposed to pressing them against the interior glazing, necessitating a walk from the centrally-located (pink identified) food preparation stalls, through the (green-identified) non-food stalls, to get to moveable tables and chairs? Perhaps open up the center as the ultimate embrace of both sellers and buyers, and as a place that celebrates food, culture, and people.

“Interior urbanism” speaks to how people utilize and experience large-volume spaces. Consider creating a system that reflects how people want to spend their time. As represented, the layout is more about efficiency than experience.

The overall volume of the proposed building is undifferentiated. Look to other “glass boxes” that are something more than a big, glassy structure.

Overall, there is room for significant improvement in an effort to marry commerce with social experience. This is a significant venue for the citizens of Baltimore, their friends and families. It is a place to which generations of Baltimoreans have ascended. It should be celebrated, as such. Baltimore is unique among urban metropoli (save San Francisco) for the distribution of a grid system ignoring/embracing topography. This site's significance epitomizes that uniqueness where a market and civic space are at the highest elevation of its surroundings. Embrace this feature, and use it to celebrate emotional and nutritional well-being. It is a powerful site deserving of civic greatness.

PANEL ACTION: Discussion Only.

Attending:

Aaron Moore – Greater Baltimore Committee

Frank Diffenbacher, Todd Grove, Patrick Ness, Blake Gifford – Murphy and Dittenhafer

Robert Thomas – Lexington Market Inc.

Alice Storm Jones, Matt Ellingson – Floura Teeter LA

Ed Gunts - BAP

Messrs. Bowden, Rubin*, Ms. O'Neill and Ms. Ilieva - UDARP Panel

Anthony Cataldo, Tom Stosur, Christina Hartsfield, Matthew DeSantis, Jeff LaNoue, Kristen Ahearn, Holly Freishtat- Planning