

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

Date: January 7, 2016

Meeting # 219

Project: Port Covington Master Plan

Phase: Introduction

Location: Port Covington Peninsula

PRESENTATION:

Caroline Paff, Vice President of Sagamore Development Company, introduced the Project Team and the 266-acre Master Plan for the Port Covington Peninsula bounded by I-95 to the north and the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River to the west, south and east. The presentation offered a high-level overview of the main concepts and systems throughout the project with approx. 114 acres dedicated to the public realm (including 40 acres of public park land), 76 acres to new mixed use building blocks, 50 acres to the new Under Armour Campus, and 26 acres to existing Locke Insulators site. Sagamore Development Company does not own or control all properties within the Master Plan area but they have been incorporated as part of a cohesive vision for the Port Covington peninsula.

Addison Palmer, Regional Manager for STV Incorporated, introduced:

- History of the site – its transformation from a recreational area in the 19th century to a railroad terminal in the early 20th century and to its current state as industrial district with various commercial & office uses.
- Existing conditions – I-95 and Hanover Street transportation corridors, Spring Garden Swing Bridge, existing structures, ongoing uses.
- Environmental constraints – elevated highway and railroad yard physical barrier, elevated Hanover Street, 1000-foot Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, 100-foot Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Buffer, 100-year Floodplain, and Habitat Protection area.

The Study Area for the project suggests a series of overlays introducing new streets and block as multiple phases reflecting land acquisition and market needs take place involving 9-13 million square feet of mixed use development. The Port Covington Master Plan was presented as a 20-year economic opportunity for Baltimore governed by the following urban design goals:

- Create a sense of arrival and make it a destination.
- Make strong connections between uses, ecology and people.
- Induce multi-modal behaviors through great design and investment in the public realm.
- Include multiple points of view to ensure diversity and plan resiliency.
- Innovate.

Mark Sardegna, Vice President of Elkus Manfredi Architects, presented the urban Framework Plan for the peninsula discussing potential challenges in connecting Port Covington to South Baltimore to the north across the I-95 highway and CSX Riverside yard as well as east-west over Hanover Street. The configuration of the urban grid takes into account the existing buildings in order to allow for phasing and seeks to establish strong connection to the waterfront by way of continuous pedestrian access as a non-privatized, public experience. The general building height would increase gradually from south to north starting with predominantly two-story buildings along the waterfront and reaching high-rise buildings along the highway.

The plan establishes the following districts with corresponding use in order of prevalence:

- East Waterfront – restaurant, retail, entertainment, hospitality; to include Sagamore Whiskey distillery and various waterfront attractions.
- Restaurant Row – residential, retail, parking; to include pedestrian only streets with small scale commercial experience similar to old European cities.
- Greenway Sanctuary and Stables – residential, retail, maker space; to include Baltimore Mounted Police Stables as feature element of the main open public space.
- West End – office, residential, commodity, retail, maker space, parking; to include largest waterfront park experience.
- Founders’ Park – office, residential, retail, parking; to include a central public space surrounded by high-rise buildings.
- Hanover Street & Bridge – highlighting the bridge and providing opportunities for public programming at the waterfront.
- I-95 & McComas – a series of outdoor experiences that active the area under the highway and the buildings facing that space.

The Master Plan would also incorporate systems for public services and would seek to establish a public-private partnership for maintaining the privately owned public space.

Christopher Streb, Ecological Engineer with Biohabitats, Inc. introduced the site context and discussed the presence of extensive shoreline debris, hard bulkhead, eroded shoreline conditions, and general contamination that contribute to the ecological deterioration of the entire shoreline as indicated in the Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (QHEI) Assessment that was conducted. The index is used as a benchmark to monitor and document measurable improvements of the Port Covington Ecosystem Services over time as part of a larger effort to restore the Middle Branch coastal ecosystem. The plan proposes improvements to various soft and hard shoreline conditions and the creation of a living shoreline, fully integrated in the urban environment, in an effort to improve the overall interaction between people and ecology.

Michael Blier, Principal at Landworks Studio Inc. presented the Open Space Aspirations of Port Covington that use Ecology as an urbanizing element manifested through a healthy, vibrant lifestyle:

- Ecological Aspirations – enhance and stabilize the shoreline, habitat restoration and expansion, green infrastructure, improved water quality
- Lifestyle Aspirations – recreation, entertainment, water access, residential, work place

The overall vision results in an Open Space Synthesis of High Performance Open Space System that merges:

- Active Ecology – wetlands, storm water management, harbor habitat, diverse planning, ecological corridors
- Human performance – running track, sports fields, workout course, biking, adventure sports

A main goal for the Open Space plans is to use landscape as driver for the urban experience with ecology flowing through the urban fabric & emerging in various forms. The design team proposes an Open Space System of day and night outdoor experiences that provides connections between neighborhoods, parks, and the waterfront, establishes eco corridors, and introduces street planting and habitat enhancement throughout the peninsula. Proposed Open Space Parks include West Waterfront (35 acres), Connection (1 acre), Sports Park (7 acres), Founders’ Park (3 acres), The Green (5 acres), East Waterfront (8 acres), Archaeological Pier (2 acres).

RJ Eldridge, Chief Operating Officer of Toole Design Group and Barbara Mosier, Traffic Engineer with STV Inc. presented the Multi-modal Infrastructure Aspiration for the project to “create an accessible, active and livable community” that incorporates walking, biking and public transit in a 50% mode share with vehicular transportation – an improvement from the current 26/74% multimodal split.

The plan relies on establishing strong multimodal connections through the use of lighting, high quality transit stops, bike share, real time information, and wayfinding signage. The project also strives for a high quality walk-able and bicycle network of “connected, compelling, safe, comfortable, and active” paths, lanes, sidewalks, and bridges that run through the entire site and connect to the surrounding areas of the city.

The proposed multimodal transportation system includes a new Circulator Loop, new Water Taxi stops, new Light Rail connections, and modified Citylink bus routes. The plan aims at concentrating vehicular transportation along the highway connections, Hanover and Cromwell Streets and providing parking close to those locations in order to encourage walking and biking to final destination. Proposed street typologies are organized in a network of Arterials and Connectors that include Gateway Streets, A (Lifestyle) Streets, B Streets, Pedestrian Only and Curbless Streets.

Caroline Paff concluded the presentation by outlining the upcoming review process that would include East Waterfront Park Design followed by separate reviews for all districts, phasing plan and comprehensive Master Plan review over the following months. She also underscored Sagamore’s commitment to the long term commitment to Port Covington and Baltimore City.

Comments from the Panel:

The Panel applauded the quality of the presentation and the overall goals and aspirations of the Master Plan proposal specifically as they relate to the commitment in the scale and scope of open space and non-privatized waterfront access for a community that is walk-able and inclusive and treats the waterfront as a public amenity. Panelists also complemented the commitment to restoring the Middle Branch ecosystem and establishing an innovative setting for the confluence of people and ecology in an urban setting that could result in a project of national significance. They also cautioned that further detailed proposals would begin to reveal the true challenges and opportunities for the site and encouraged the design team to be inclusive in their planning effort as the project provides a great opportunity for economic, cultural, educational development for the City of Baltimore. The following items were highlighted for further study and subject to review in subsequent presentations:

- Public access & use vs. Ecology – nature of the overlap and integration to the extent that one does not compromise the other.
- Mounted Police Stables – not an appropriate focal point to the primary public space. It could be more integrated via additional related programming or seek a better location on the peninsula.
- Connectivity – one of the most important parts of the review process as it ensures a cohesive urban fabric. Hanover Street is a critical element in connecting the east and west side of the peninsula and presents a significant physical barrier to be addressed specifically in order to ensure an uninterrupted flow through the area. Cromwell Street presents another critical edge that needs to connect Sagamore’s development to the Underarmor Campus and East to West side seamlessly. Combined, Hanover and Cromwell streets create an obscure access to “The Green” park. This locations seems to require a landmark that encourages pedestrians to that location. The diagonal axis from Founders’ Park heading south need arrival and resolution (vista or destination).

- Urban Grid – some of the blocks at the east and west edges of the peninsula get significantly larger and may result in disruption of the urban fabric and the ability to connect to the waterfront.
- Axis – powerful axis need a “receiver” or important visual connections. Connections to Ferry Bar Park need to be strengthened and are lacking from the current proposal.
- Mixed use – districts should strive for clear definition in building type and use in order to provide varied experiences for residents vs. visitors for the benefit of varied degrees of privacy vs. public life for the benefit of a diverse urban experience.
- Home ownership – an adequate mix of rental and owned properties needs to be established for the various districts to ensure a healthy and diverse urban environment.
- Flexibility – strategy for the transformation and evolution of the plan and its structures is needed to ensure the long term sustainability of the development with respect to parking structures and miscellaneous commercial spaces.
- Visual statement – project has the opportunity to provide an iconic statement for the site via visible landmarks or signature structures. Highway provides an opportunity for a view of the entire area that may be obstructed by high-rise buildings along that edge.
- Landscape continuity – significant landscape and ecological effort at the waterfront needs to extend seamlessly into the neighborhoods.

Panel Action:

No action needed.

Attending:

Caroline Paff, Steve Siegel, Eliz Alexander, Michael Pokorny, Curtis Adams, Nina Albert, Caroline Pease
 - Sagamore Development Company
 Addison Palmer, Ryan Barsh, Barbara Mosier, Susan Williams - STV Incorporated
 Mark Sardegna - Elkus Manfredi Architects
 Christopher Streb - Biohabitats, Inc.
 Michael Blier, David Shimmel, Chris MacFarlane - Landworks Studio Inc.
 RJ Eldridge, Mike Loe - Toole Design Group
 Kevin Day – Living Design Lab
 Rob Aumer, Frank Grauman, Amy Cha, Wolfram Arendt – Bohlin Cywinski Jackson
 Jeremy B. Jordan, Jen Trompetter, Jen Jessup – NBW
 Jon Laria, Mark Pollak – Ballard Spahr
 Steve Baumgartner
 Davon Barbour – Downtown Partnership
 Stephanie Streb – Public
 Dan Young – Public
 Shawn King, Brian Miller – Under Armour
 Patrick Terranova – BDC
 Ed Gunts – AN/ Brew
 Patrick Sutton – PSA
 John Furman, Dierdre Crowl – KCI
 Scott Vieth, Joel Fidler – ASG
 James Alston – WCEDC
 Nick Pfisterer – Mayson Dixon

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

Tom Stosur, Anthony Cataldo, Christina Hartsfield, Theo Ngongang, Tamara Woods, Brent Flickinger, Reni Lewal, Mary-Colleen Buettner, Andy Cook, Jennifer Leonard, Kyle Leggs, Amy Gilder-Busatti - Planning