

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

Date: March 31, 2022

Meeting #60

Project: 305 W. Franklin Street

Phase: Schematic Design

Location: West Franklin Street at State Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Gordon Godat with JP2 Architects began the presentation with a brief overview of the site and context. The project occupies half the block between West Franklin and Pierce Street along State Street, just outside the CHAP historic districts of Seton Hill to the northwest and Howard Street Commercial to the east. The infill site is L-shaped and surrounded by a mix of historic buildings. Façades of these existing buildings range from very ornate and detailed to unadorned brick. The immediate context includes several significant structures and newer construction projects: the Congress Apartment Building to the north, Mayfair Theater and St. James Place to the east. This is the fourth building in a series of sites to be developed.

The proposed program is mixed-use with ground level retail at the northeast corner and residential above. The building massing is impacted by the L-shaped site footprint, with the form more or less extruded from the site boundary, rising approximately 73 feet. Parking is contained on the first two levels and the public lobby is located on West Franklin Street at the north side of the building. Because Franklin Street is a west-bound one-way street, the northeast corner of State and Franklin is very visible. There is no height limit for the site, but the building responds to the context of the neighborhood by capping the height at 6 stories; neighboring buildings range from 36 ft. to 66 ft. in height. The team also tried to capture some of the historic character of the neighborhood by including heavier masonry materials at the base and a cornice feature at the top of the building.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation and continued with questions and comments together. Because the site development is minimal, comments related to the site

were few. The site comments have been grouped together with comments about overall context, with the building comments following.

Site and Context:

- There is not a lot of site for the Panel to comment on; but the team should look to street-scape requirements of the historic district for inspiration and guidance on site improvements. Referencing the context will help the building and site fit in better with the urban context.
- Pay special attention to the site opportunities at the corner; simply scored concrete or other small interventions will help create some hierarchy. For the retail component at this corner, consider setting out café tables and chairs to create some additional interest.
- A vegetated roof would be preferable, but Panel understands that this feature is not compatible with wood-frame construction.
- The boundary of the historic district is somewhat arbitrary, and not visible to the general public. Good that the building is starting to address the context but employ caution with new construction. Neighboring buildings have very high-quality, handsome construction that can make new construction materials and methods seem cheap if not addressed properly. This can be avoided with proper detailing, material placement, proportions, etc.

Building:

- The proportions need more refinement; massing can be edited to feel more elegant. With a two-story base, suitable for more horizontal facades, the resulting building feels a bit square and squat. To better relate the building to its context, reference buildings with similar character (site, program, etc.) and develop a language that echoes them rather than trying to align with smaller buildings with a 2-story base.
- Consider stone instead of brick for the base – make the materials distinct and execute them in a contemporary way in order to elevate the design within a limited palette. A change in the windows can simulate crown at the top of the building. The crown doesn't necessarily need to be a traditional cornice or a contemporary soffit but rather a subtle articulation of the facade.
- Use the “front volume” as a primary façade and transition to secondary / tertiary façades to create more hierarchy. Using the different sides of the building to articulate the massing with more elegance and subtlety will help to break up the mass into a more appropriate scale and form on this block.

- The program is straightforward, and the proposed approach is very rational. The site is defined and somewhat restrictive; massing responds to site challenges in a very generic way, but there is more opportunity here to create interest, to design something that responds not just to the basic site challenge, but to the nuance of the neighborhood.
- Overall massing – the building is extruded at the same height overall; massing can respond more to the various buildings around the site. Perhaps the building could step in response to the townhouses across the street, with more height located on Franklin.
- Condition around the building is varied, and the building should respond to the varying datums. Potential to transition the building mass at the elevator core, as well as a bump-out at the west-facing façade.
- Location of the building near the historic district can connect it to the context. For instance, the northeast corner of State and Franklin offers an opportunity for a moment, not just at the ground level, but all the way up. Something more modern to make a statement might be appropriate to this building.
- Frame element at the top northeast corner feels a bit dated and out of place in this context; the balconies are not visible except from a very specific angle, so ending the frame at the balconies seems somewhat arbitrary.
- When suggesting that the new building “reference context” and relate to the surrounding buildings, the Panel is not advising the team to replicate historic architectural features. The building should be contemporary and elegant with its own fresh language while responding to proportions, regulating lines, rhythms, etc. in dialogue with the existing urban fabric. It is the responsibility of the design/development teams, not the approving entity, to provide a high-quality design that can contribute positively to Baltimore’s urban environment.

Next Steps:

Address the Panel’s comments above for next UDAAP presentation.

Attending:

Adam Morris, Christopher Mfume, Joshua Neiman, Tenille Jordan, Gordon Godat –
Development Team

Jessica Iannetta, Ed Gunts, Larry Jennings, Ryan Solomon, Rick Abbruzzese, Klaus Philipsen, Neil Jurgens – Attending

Mr. Anthony, Mses. Illeva and Bradley – UDAAP Panel
Tamara Woods, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette – Planning