

9BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: June 22, 2023

Meeting #79

Project: ASHLAND-MADISON APARTMENTS

Phase: Design Development

Location: 1928 E. Madison Street, Middle East

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Architect Marty Maren introduced the project and development team. The developer is Junica Development LLC; Marren Architects is the designer, and the Civil Engineer is Colbert Matz Rosenfelt. The site is zoned Bio-Science, which allows for the proposed use, which had shifted from mixed-use at the ground floor with residential above to the current proposal of multi-family only. A shift in the market drove the team to make the shift to a residential-only building but the overall form and massing are similar to what was shared previously with the Panel.

The site is quite narrow and extends from E. Madison to Ashland. Because of the tight site, the project completed Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) prior to the previous UDAAP meeting, in October of 2022. There is significant grade change of about 18 feet between Ashland Avenue and Madison Street, so the building reads as 5-stories on Madison Street and 7-stories on Ashland Avenue.

East Baltimore Development, Inc. (EBDI) had referred to the building as “the pink building” because of a small rose-colored brick building that was on the site a number of years ago. That original building was razed, but the design incorporates a pink light feature as an homage to the previous building. The light could also be used to celebrate the Orioles or Ravens, etc. with other color options.

The project team noted that federal fund rate changes have impacted some of the changes reflected in the presentation. Some of the changes included are not directly related to the previous comments, while some of the comments have been addressed. One of the bigger changes is the shift away from mixed use, and the addition of more units within a similar building envelope. Retail was removed due to the soft retail market. In addition to these changes the team focused on the following:

- Design has been updated to feature a tall, linear light feature that emphasizes the height.
- Improving the alley to send a message that the space is cared for.
- The elevators and stairs have been split up to serve the two ends of the building and are no longer part of the composition of the alley elevation.
- The building has been divided visually into two volumes using a change of material at the notch in the Chapel Street façade.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the very succinct presentation and asked clarifying questions. Following the questions, the Panel continued with comments. The regular UDAAP Chair, Pavlina Ilieva, was not able to attend the presentation and provided comments based on the team's draft submission to the Panel.

Clarifications:

- *Which comments were not accommodated?* The Panel had commented that the ends should be treated differently, but the team felt that if they were treated similarly instead, it would be beneficial to the overall project read. The linear nature was addressed with the materials.
- *Addition of the dog run on the Chapel Street side (on the townhouse side) – does the developer own any of this portion of the site?* Yes, the developer owns a 6-foot-wide section of the alley. This space is a paved 10-foot alley, and the plan is to fence a portion of it for dogs.
- *It is unclear if there are any streetscape improvements proposed and how building signage is approached – please share the thinking about the site.* The sidewalk will be repaved, and water meters will be moved. Sidewalk is bumped out and widening the sidewalk in front allows for a tree pit, bicycle rack, etc. DOT was consulted for the ramp condition on the Madison Street side of the building. Some tweaks since the SPRC approval, but this design is largely the same. There are not too many opportunities for trees, but two new street trees (one at either end of the building) will be added.

Site & Building Comments:

- Study the Ashland and Madison façades to improve the proportions of the windows in the dark cement panel. As proposed, the treatment is reflective of a secondary facade treatment introduced to a very prominent portion of the building. Either enlarge the glass or introduce some façade treatment under the windows to enlarge them or visually transform their proportions.
- The tops of the central volumes at Ashland and Madison appear very heavy and flat as they are simply extruded up and unarticulated. There is an opportunity to refine the massing articulation.
- Even adding a single tree will make a difference in this dense area of the city where there is a lot of paving – the tree will be an important addition to the project, despite seeming like a small move.
- There are not a lot of landscape opportunities on this site, but the team should explore any chance to pull the façade back for some planting. Consider this option at the ground floor now that the retail is gone. The panel is not asking the team to reduce the unit count, but there might be an opportunity to slightly recess the first floor at the lobby and change the language of the façade to make it softer.
- Team is reminded that the organization and arrangement of the slides matters to the legibility of the overall presentation. The previous and current design proposals should be next to each other, to add to the clarity and highlight what changes have been made.

- The west-facing façade is more open and will need to be treated differently from the east façade. Each of the four sides of the building are very different; they should respond more to the context. The Madison side of the building fronts onto rear yards, for example.
- Appropriately addressing the four unique façades gives an opportunity for the building to fit into the context better.
- The Panel feels that losing the balconies is unfortunate turn for the project but understands the need to maintain a budget. The corner is still with an element that draws the façades together, which is a good move in place of the balconies.
- The side façade could benefit from a slight reorganization of the windows, to give them more breathing room. The Panel understands that fenestration was organized in response to the unit layouts and requirements of code (due to the position of the building on the site, there is a less glazing on one of the long sides) but team is encouraged to take one more pass at the overall organization.
- The light bar element makes the building seem like a hotel, rather than a multi-family building. The team should reconsider this element – how the building turns the corner is unique enough as a way-finding device.

Next Steps:

Address the panels comments above and work with Planning staff to complete design review.

Attending:

Martin Marren – Marren Architects

Carla Ryon – CMR

Larry Jennings, Ronald Libscomb – Junica Project Team

Brandon Brookes, Kern Johnson, Peter Smith - Attendees

Anthony Osbourne, Sharon Bradley* - UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard**, Caitlin Audette, Eric Tiso, Matt DeSantis, Marie McSweeny Anderson - Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff