

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

Date: March 4, 2021

Meeting #43

Project: Canton Overlook

Phase: Schematic I

Location: 1617 Broening Highway, Broening Manor Neighborhood

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Jessica Zuniga from Foundation Development Group began the presentation with a brief history of the site. The site was zoned C-4 at the time of purchase but has been rezoned to C-3 to avoid ground floor retail requirement. Surrounding businesses, including Blueprint Robotics, Royal Farms, and a fire department, have expressed a need for workforce housing. There are some single family and smaller rowhomes behind the site (to the east), but the density is relatively low. Most of the existing multi-family is not well configured for families, so many employees commute to the neighborhood for work.

The proposed building is elevator serviced and will provide amenities seen in market rate communities: balcony facing the harbor, fitness room, in-unit washer / dryer, multiple bathrooms and bigger 2- and 3- bedroom. The building aims to provide better options for neighborhood workforce.

Nancy Liebrecht of Moseley Architects continued the presentation by describing the context around the site, which is located on a light industrial corridor in the Broening Manor neighborhood. The presentation also included an explanation of how the team arrived on the proposed design, several iterations for situating the building, and inspiration for the vertical design and façade elements.

Urban Design Goals:

- Building as a transition between the industrial use and the smaller residential.
- Extend the path along the existing paper alley (Brown Avenue).
- Create amenities and outdoor spaces.
- Buffer against the heavily trafficked corridor on Broening Hwy.
- Reflect maritime industrial feel of the harbor.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the project team for their presentation. The panel then moved into questions and comments.

- *On Brown, are there any speed controls planned?* Brown will be private, but the team is considering adding speed humps and a crosswalk.
- *Are there amenities planned for the site?* Patio is shown off the community room in this iteration, but stormwater will drive how much of the remaining site is programmed for active or passive recreational space.
- *How many units is this building?* 150 units total: 53 at 1-BR, 76 at 2-BR, 21 at 3-BR
- *Where does Brown Avenue cease to be public?* Right at the edge of the site.

Site:

- Exciting to see new housing in this light industrial part of the city; it is a very busy part of town, with a lot of activity despite the fact that it is mostly industrial. Infusing housing with production and services is important for cities as they reinvent themselves from their industrial genesis and look toward a post-industrial future.
- Conflict between a heavily trafficked road, protecting residents with a parking buffer, and continuing the urban fabric. By moving the building away from Broening HWY and separating it with a parking lot and a fence, it seems as though the site is walled off from its surroundings.
- The team's main reason for developing here was to provide a place for residents near their work, yet the building presents as if it were for commuters. Current siting of the building so far from Broening Hwy is counteractive and suburban in nature; it doesn't contribute to the building of community.
- Extraordinarily difficult site – a ground floor commercial component would be able to help mitigate some of the challenge and would benefit from being closer to the street on Broening, but the Panel realizes retail is not a part of the program.
- Team should consider ways to insert the very large building into the urban block while addressing the hostile condition of the street – the current proposal leaves it without an “address” on the highway.
- Resituating the building closer along the urban front (Broening Hwy) while still making it hospitable will require a close study of the landscape as a buffer; done correctly, this can benefit the block and the building, helping it to feel like a part of the urban fabric and protecting it from high traffic volume. Noise will be mitigated by the building envelope.
- Pedestrian comfort should be strongly considered in the streetscape design.

- Considering this building is focused on families, there will be a large number of kids – crossing the parking lot to get to the sidewalk should be safe and intuitive.
- Outside of the building should be planned for families. Stormwater management and budget are valid concerns, but having a safe, comfortable space for kids and families around the building is key.
- Brown Avenue terminating at the site creates a potential asset; the team is challenged to look at opportunities to reclaim that space as something other than a street. Bringing it through the site as a drive isle leaves it ambiguous; as designed, it will invite cut-through. Potential to have a buffer and more urban parking condition at Brown, opportunity to arch over Brown and move parking to the rear of the site.
- Trees nestle the buildings and make them seem welcoming – if the trees fail, the site will be bleak and barren so careful consideration to the quality of the landscape design and installation will be necessary to ensure success.
- Attention to the landscape is especially important, buffer between the building and the highway must be strong to be successful but does not necessarily need to be as deep as what is shown with the current layout (parking does not need to be in the front).
- Some of the earlier site configuration concepts are stronger than the current proposed design.
- Parking lot buffer and continuing Brown through are the two biggest challenges and compromise the whole plan – consider a scenario where the parking moves to the back would still allow for a meaningful, pleasant buffer in the front of the building, while still allowing for continuation of the neighboring urban fabric.
- The Panel sympathizes with the challenge on a busy road, but there are similar examples that are addressed successfully that the team could look to.
- Announcement and clarity of entrance are important – strong sense of arrival and how one makes one’s way to the entrance need to be laid out in a very clear and inviting manner with site gestures as well as architectural treatment.

Building:

- Address transitions on all sides of the site – industrial uses on Broening Highway, residential behind. More exploration at the fundamental massing level is needed.
- Use the building to transition between bulky warehouses and the smaller houses. The façades can connect and still be articulated; building does not necessarily need to fit with warehouse scale.
- Emphatic presence of the building will improve and humanize the street on Broening. Fragmentation is not necessary in front but is appropriate as the building(s) transitions to the neighborhood.
- Team is strongly encouraged to revise the front on Broening highway.

- Architecture should be part of the urban idea. As designed, façades are undifferentiated – architecture along the highway can be distinct and unique, but the residential side of the site could be quieter and relate more to the houses. This will reinforce the urban idea. Building language lacks hierarchy.
- Consider erosion of the massing – important to look at it within the context of the block.
- Maritime industrial theme is ok, but container theme has been taken too literally – becomes cliché and dated. Language of the industrial can be abstracted; feels awkward as designed (with the container proportions stacked and offset).
- Silo Point is a good precedent for the container theme; window placement and proportions are a better example of how to abstract.
- Canton is a different context from Broening Manor – this development presents an opportunity to create something fresh and new.
- Traditional siding with the modern container-inspired material result in a visual clash and present the latter as a faux treatment; consider greater cohesion in form or materiality.
- Views planted on the ground will help the team gauge the scale at a more human level – important to study how these spaces relate to each other on the ground and use landscape to mitigate scale and productive transitions.
- As designed, the landscaping is treated as leftover space – the team should look at working with the same kit of parts but prioritizing and reinforcing relationships between landscape, building and street. The landscape glues these spaces together and works as transition from inside to outside, from private to public.
- Study how to develop meaningful and deliberate relationships between the façade and the site. This is important both for those residents inside looking out, and vice versa. Spatial relationships are opportunities and can be developed further.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Jessica Zuniga – Foundation Development Group

Bob Bathurst – PSG Developers and Engineers Ltd.

Nancy Liebrecht, Michael Blake – Moseley Architects

Dane Lawrence, Ryan Ahn – Attendees

Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal

Mses. O’Neill, Ilieva, Bradley – UDAAP Panel

Laurie Feinberg*, Ren Southard, Tamara Woods, Martin French, Matt DeSantis – Planning