

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

Date: May 6, 2021

Meeting #46

Project: Cross Keys Multifamily Building

Phase: Schematic I

Location: 5102 Falls Road

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Zach Gorn from Questar Development gave an introduction of the project and overview of the context. The project is approximately 500,000 square feet of mixed-use / multi-family housing. Scott Scarfone from Kimley Horn continued the presentation with context diagrams and an explanation of the pedestrian circulation on the site.

Phil Casey from CBT Architects gave a description of the existing architecture and the evolution of the massing. The building contains retail, housing, courtyards and a rooftop pool. The location across from a large green lawn that will remain inspired the open design of the massing.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the presentation and continued clarifications, questions and discussion.

Clarification:

- *Does the project provide access down to the Jones Falls?* No, the site is too steep because of the flood plain.
- *What is the purpose of the skewed (northern) wing of the building?* The team both wanted to address the easement, and embrace the open space across Hamill Ave.
- *What is happening in the 3-story portion at the front of the building near the entrance?* This is a community amenity space for residents.
- *What is the purpose of the parking?* These are intended to be lessee, and will function as short-term parking spaces.

- *Please clarify the street scape on Hamill:* the rendering is conceptual, and this project will set the precedent. The team would like to elevate the street scape, as the current development is currently very suburban. The team has about 13' of sidewalk shown in this iteration.
- *What other things did the team consider when thinking about integrating the building?* Materiality, pedestrian connectivity were main considerations.

Site:

- Cross Keys is a wonderful little enclave, with a sprinkling of buildings. Any new addition needs to blend in to preserve the charm.
- Closed portion of the massing seems foreign. The condition is more fitting for a dense downtown; with the understanding the massing may not change much because of program requirements, the building should be pushed away from Hamill Ave. as far as possible.
- Streetscape in front of the building should focus on traffic calming. It is important to define what type of urbanity the new building will create; consider the softness of the rest of the neighborhood. 13' setback is very tight and will not likely be a comfortable transition from the buildings that are set back further.
- Building is rational and meets program needs; this is a good starting point, but design needs to be carefully considered for it to truly feel integrated. Study how the building responds to the varied adjacent conditions.
- Circulation and connectivity to the rest of Cross Keys need to be enhanced for the project to be successful. Study how the building entries and architectural language signal important physical connections.
- Parking at the front of the building plays down the important relationship between the green space and the entrance. The street profile needs to develop with the purpose of prioritizing pedestrians. Repeating the head-in parking is discouraged. Consider parallel parking.
- Revisiting the site and massing together will start to inform what needs to happen with the corners, and where the tight spots are located. Study which pieces can shift to allow more breathing room at a very diagrammatic level.
- The southeast corner of the building cuts off the jog in the road; important to reconnect it visually – in general, there is an opportunity for the building to respond better to the site at the corners.

Building:

- The massing needs more study. There is an opportunity to mitigate the height of the building with some terracing or implied horizontality which will help the building to relate more to the existing mid-century buildings.
- Try organizing the building into a few smaller pieces – treat the building as if it is two city blocks instead of a mega-block by differentiating it more. Opportunity to have the building read as one doughnut building and one bar building.
- Roof terrace allows for appreciation of the outdoor space, which is a good move. Consider revising the massing to create a second courtyard facing the green space and extend the upper portion of the buildings toward the green space like outstretched fingers.
- The mass and architectural language need more robust logic, this can be achieved by responding more to the context. The site has very different conditions on all sides; reflecting the different conditions in the different masses and their façades will help resolve the building.
- Project would benefit from a clearer hierarchy.
- 3-story amenity space deflects viewshed away from the courtyard; this could be resolved by creating two pieces that frame the green space across Hamill, or by reorienting it to focus on the green space across the street.
- Base and top languages are not yet resolved; base seems too transparent and the top is very heavy and busy. Opportunity to weave these together more purposefully.
- Changes in the architectural language impact the legibility of the building; the courtyard registers as busy and high energy, which makes the building feel out of place with the cozy village setting.
- Proposed design looks both busy and generic; opportunity to create something fresh that won't feel dated.
- Reflect on the precedent examples – these are very good. The team could employ strategies from the precedents to simplify and clarify the logic of the building; reserving the brick to the lower portion (3 or 4 stories) with the dark panel above will allow the building to read as more horizontal rather than the tall masonry bays of the current proposal.
- Main entrance is hidden from view, but there is an opportunity for a more compressed corner at the northeast side to make it more visible and establish a connection to the shopping center.
- Building is much bigger than its surroundings, but this can be mitigated through the proper architectural language. Volume hovering above glassy façade reinforces the

heavy feel. Consider the precedents shown and develop a similar language to mitigate the visual weight.

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing comments above.

Attending:

Stephen Gorn, Zach Gorn, Ruthie Schuchalter – Questar Developers

Scott Scarhone – Kimly Horn

Phil Casey – CBT Architects

Arsh Mirmiram – Caves Valley Partners

Mr. Anthony, Mses. O'Neill and Ilieva – UDAAP Panel

Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Alex Vespoli, Henry Celli, Brandon Brooks, Caroline Hecker, Marc Moura – Attending

Laurie Feinberg*, Chris Ryer, Eric Tiso, Tamara Woods, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette – Planning