

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

Date: March 25, 2021

Meeting #44

Project: Old Town Redevelopment

Phase: Master Plan

Location: 500 N. Gay Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Dana Henson introduced the project and team, adding emphasis that the Old Town redevelopment is of great importance to her team. The team has reviewed the Panel's previous comments in detail and feel that this updated proposal responds to those comments. Donald Kan, Davin Hong and Sharon Huber-Plano continued the presentation with a brief refresher of the project context and history, new elements and landscape approach. Several features of the site have changed, including shifting of the Central Plaza, offset of Forrest Street, introduction of circular drop off and visitors center building and narrowing of the approach from 64' to 50' off the Forrest Street entry plaza, reconfiguration of Mott Street building and new lawn area.

Main considerations for site design:

- Existing utilities and historic structures.
- Circulation, especially pedestrian and new street configuration of Forrest.
- Hotel with open ground level for flow through the site and area for gathering.
- Activation of the street.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the project team for their presentation and praised the team for re-examining the plan to align with the overall project goals. Panelists combined their questions and comments, focusing on the master plan aspects rather than details of each building.

Overall

- Commended the project team on the great improvements.
- Updated plan is really refreshing on how it's evolved. It's beginning to now feel as if it's an oasis from the traffic around it, but it is not static.
- The kinetic expression has to be complemented by program to make it lively.
- There is potential connection and opportunities to the areas around the mall.

Plaza and Pedestrian Spine

- The plaza shift and offset of Forrest Street is great. It works well spatially, and is picturesque yet formal.
- The shift of the Central Plaza invites you into the space and let the buildings shine.
- Concern on how much the landscape elements need to support shift because it seems to be too much pressure on the axis and crossing. One thought, is there a continuous paving that can define an area (–ie node) and not just linear elements and axial relationship.
- Pedestrian Spine- details and cadence change as you cross the plaza area so it's not so monotonous along entire mall. Variation should occur in ground plane.
- Second thoughts on the striping and graphic nature of the pavers pattern go back and revisit to become less busy.
- The paving and materiality doesn't need to be overdone. It can be a transition and meeting place. Dial back at the nexus.
- Questioned the 3 trees on the lawn- let the lawn be the expression. Terminate the lawn maybe further back from the roadway curve.
- The new gateway plaza at the corner Ensor and Orleans is good.
- Concerns about striping and graphic nature of pattern. Looking at it as a diagram- relook a paver system on the plaza and spine. The buildings are well proportioned and related to the open space, but the busy paving undermines the role and detract from the continuity and sense of arrival.
- Darker pavers as a unifying element and perhaps add in the textured pavers and other differentiation. Play with the scale of the paver/hardscape system to encourage more lateral flow into the space.

Lawn

- Study the lawn as its own entity, but also as it relates to the new plaza and pedestrian spine.
- Need to do a sun study. It is critical to do for the success of the quality of the space, material selection and survivability of the plants.
- The lawn needs to have more presences in the space. Maybe raise it to give it more meaning.
- Concern about the width of the lawn. Because it is thin, is it being over programmed.

Entry Zone Area Forrest Street

- Great contemporary reinterpretation of market building.
- Arbor near the new visitor center looks lost and floating. Needs to have more presence, placement and scale. Determine what it is connected to in the space.
- Worries about trellis – may be too much for the entrance (plaza potential idea lest other options besides trellis and row of trees)
- Minor concern- precedent image of glazed awning is nice on merchandize mart, but maybe lose one of the trees at the curve of drop off to same concerns on the lawn comments.
- Shade structure could be more artful and playful if it is going to be there because it is in a prominent spot.

Parking/Drop Off

- Separating 2 drop-offs is starting to work well. Market drop off gives a great arrival.
- Misgivings about entrance to parking garage entrances. The detail level of how it will work with hotel will be important because too much of a congestion point. Relook at one more time.
- Access to garage Mott Street is more successful than the hotel. May need to give the second entrance to the hotel garage on East Street to give relief from the main access off of Forrest Street.

Plaza At Triangle Plaza at Orleans Street And Ensor Street

- This plaza changed most dramatically.
- It has become too eroded and doesn't yet feel inviting because it feels like a leftover geometry. Needs to feel comfortable and inviting to people.
- Looking for a design attitude for the plaza. It is the terminus of the mall. This area needs further study.
- Extend tree line from Ensor down to the plaza and add vegetation along Ensor, so it does not seem left over and exposed. Add in some softness to the plaza and shelter/buffer from traffic.
- Needs to be treated as important as the other plaza spaces.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Dan Henson, Dana Henson – Henson Development

Addison Palmer, Kristen Gedeon, STV Architects Donald Kann, Vipul Talwar – Waldron Studio Architects

Sharon Huber-Plano, Precious Washington, Arlisa Anderson, Brandon Brooks, Catherine Benton Jones, Jess Iannetta, Cynthia Newman- Lynch, Andrew Beyea – Attendees

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

Lembit Jogi, Kevin Gallaher, Jaye Matthews – HABC

Laurie Feinberg*, Tamara Woods, Eric Tiso – Planning