

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

**Date:** July 8, 2021

**Meeting #48**

---

**Project:** Oswego Mall Multi-Family Housing

**Phase:** Schematic I

**Location:** Park Heights

---

**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Patrick Bateman with Penrose introduced the project, which is a HABC project. The project includes renovation of an existing group of buildings at Oswego Mall multi-family housing, and a new group of buildings on nearby infill sites. The other two sites are immediately to the south (site A) and southeast (site B) of the existing.

Modesto Bigas Valedon with WRT continued the presentation by giving an overview of the neighborhood context. The team showed several studies they undertook when determining the layout of the new buildings. Frontage on Cottage Avenue was important, which drove the team's decision about the placement of new buildings. The project aims at providing a continuous infill fabric along Cottage Ave. to blend into the existing nearby rowhouses.

The team also drew upon the existing urban fabric to develop an architectural strategy for the new buildings:

- Heavy cornice line at the second story for a distinct two-level reading
- Different materiality at the third level and a two-story bay window element
- Articulated party walls with the brick extending above to read as dividers between the units
- Emphasized entry conditions with front porches and steps to navigate grade

**DISCUSSION:**

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

**Clarification:**

- *Site A – how are rear yards going to be handled, and will the west-facing units have front yards?* The team will address the rear yards with landscaping (shrubs, herbaceous plants and trees). There will not be fences; small back yards will not be delineated in any specific way beyond having a small concrete pad.
- *Trash location – will people access the trash via the alleys?* Yes, the path to the “refuse collection area” is from the building, down the sidewalk, and to the alley where the area is located. No gates will be used, the east side of the refuse area will remain open for ease of access both by residents and for collection.
- *What is the purpose of the loading area for the community center?* The loading area is existing and will be kept in place. No specific plan to remove it.
- *Site context – it seems as though the sites (both A and B) are surrounded by a number of one-way streets, which impacts how you access the buildings. What is the logic of the infill site, and how would you leave or get back to the site?* One-way roads lead to the buildings, but both alleys are drivable, so this is how the site would be accessed.
- *How was parking allocated – what is the clear logic or rationale for locating the parking?* Parking was located for safety, and to maximize the parking while allowing more building frontage on the side of the neighborhood context.

#### **Site:**

- Panel acknowledges the sites are very difficult; resolving existing and new buildings within the site constraints will be challenging. One-way streets, fronts and backs of buildings, interior parking, topography and a mix of architecture all need to be carefully considered, analyzed and addressed with corresponding building orientation and site elements.
- Go back to the fundamentals – develop a figure ground of the existing building footprints and relate those to the residual open spaces. Allow the pedestrian pathways and primary open spaces to determine location and orientation for the new buildings. Then look at what the different facades want to convey – are they public or private? Are they front or back?
- Next create a very simple diagram showing circulations (pedestrian and vehicular including the direction of travel), fronts and backs of buildings, and existing green spaces for analysis; starting with a diagrammatic approach will help to inform a strategy for the infill, landscape and circulation strategies.
- Returning to the bigger picture / broader ideas about how the site is organized will help to connect the infill site to the existing site, start with a deliberate effort to connect the new buildings to the existing buildings through a series of pedestrian paths.

- Rethink parking locations on both sites – these feel arbitrary, as if location was selected from whatever was leftover instead of deliberate and strategic as a part of the larger landscape approach.
- Creating a more service-oriented alley on one side (east) and an experience that feels more like a small street on the other (west) will help with site organization. Greenbelt is a good example of the “garden side” and “service side” model – this strategy is reliable and consistent.
- Allow community hub to be situated in a green space by removing the loading dock.
- Wall systems and benches – consider materiality and quality. Important to have something that will stand the test of time; there are inexpensive metal benches that will look more elegant and be more durable. Also, segmented wall systems have improved greatly over the years – consider another tumbled option that will be more attractive and sturdier.
- Use the grade changes as an opportunity and an advantage.
- Specific to site A:
  - Important to knit the old and new sites together with a cohesive path; develop a site language that is legible on each of the sites to help connect them in a cohesive way.
  - Building alignment will play strongly into how the sites read within the larger context; consider building relationships on the existing site.
  - Rethink the service locations – currently the refuse area is disproportionately affecting one unit – consider the location near windows.
- Specific to site B
  - Both sides of the alley face the rears of houses, which creates a challenge for the building tucked into the site. Consider rotating the buildings to face the park and tucking the parking / service area between them (at the rear of each building).

### **Buildings:**

- Current design has a strong distinction between the fronts and backs of the new buildings; this means building façade, landscape, and circulation need to respond better to these very specific conditions – or, the team can explore an architecture that has more consistency between the front / back reading.
- Treatment of the fronts and backs as a more singular language may allow for a unified reading of the site and relate the buildings to one another in a more seamless way. This strategy is not necessarily preferred over the other strategy [of having distinct fronts and backs], but it is an option for the team to explore and may help to resolve the site.

- If the team elects the strategy of having very distinct fronts / backs of buildings – pairing the sides of the buildings with the appropriate type of landscape or context will be important moving forward. Once a front and back of the building have been established, it is important to stick to those strategies and support them with the appropriate landscape, architectural and privacy elements.
- If the language is completely distinct on the backs, it should be consistent on the interior of the site – think about this as “inside / outside” of the site rather than “front / back” of individual buildings. The alignments among buildings need to be more intentional for the site to be successful.
- There is a general lack of clarity about the architectural approach – context studies are a good start, but the challenge is that there seems to be a bit of everything included in the design, instead of a tailoring of key elements or proportions.
- The team seems to appreciate the architecture of the immediate context, but the mash-up is not working well and does not really complement the existing context.
- There is an opportunity to step back - no need to replicate the existing buildings; instead try to draw from them and be inspired by the design elements (proportion, materiality, scale, rhythms, etc).
- Consider a pitched or gabled roof for the project.
- Team is encouraged to study a more monolithic use of the materials.
- Porches need more study – use the neighborhood to look for brighter examples of porch elements and consider lighter (white) trim over the dark edges shown in the presentation renders.
- Brick transition at corner creates a bookend effect for the building; this emphasizes the height rather than mitigating it. It frames the massing instead of breaking it up, as the team mentioned they wanted to do.
- Connect meaningfully to what is happening inside the buildings.

### **Next Steps:**

Continue Schematic Design addressing comments above.

### **Attending:**

Patrick Bateman, Patrick Stewart, Avi Kopelowitz – Penrose

Claire Fishman – Carroll Engineering

Modesto Bigas Valedon – WRT

Mr. Anthony, Ms. O’Neill and Ilieva – UDAAP Panel

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Sergio Duran, Kathleen Lechleiter – Attendees

Kelly Baccala - DHCD

Chris Ryer, Eric Tiso, Tamara Woods, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, James Ashford – Planning