

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

Date: October 10, 2019

Meeting #25

Project: Univ. of MD BioPark- Gateway Project

Phase: Design Development

Location: 4 MLK Boulevard

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Will Robertson with ZGF Architects began the presentation with a review of the site, design updates, and referenced the previous UDAAP comments. The District Hall is no longer brick in favor of a precast concrete to better reflect the new building with a focus on the design and scale with an open ground floor/lobby experience that participates in the plaza. Revised perspectives were presented with the refined design. The major program of the building remains consistent with the only change being the elimination of the under-ground parking on this site (a new 300-car above grade structure will be located adjacent to this site) do to the high water table. The shape of the precast columns in the District Hall pull inspiration from the articulate stone of the existing firehouse.

Peng Gu with Mahan Rykiel reviewed the site plan in relationship to the previous UDAAP comments. The main plaza and connection to the MLK/Baltimore Street corner has been further developed. Site steps subtly transition from the plaza to the corner to address the grade and the comments. Additional street trees are placed along Baltimore Street to transition this streetscape to the existing streetscape along Baltimore St. to the west. The plaza language is brought up MLK to the secondary entrance into the main building. Desire lines were overlaid in the plaza to help inform where the circulation paths should be maintained and where additional attention should be paid to the social interaction areas. Curved benches are being incorporated under the trees to tie back to the circular motif. Granite blocks are being used within the plaza to add seating and definition in addition to the moveable seating options being deployed. The proposed lighting plan and the topographic details of the MLK frontage were also reviewed.

Will returned the conversation to the evolved building designs with a focus on the material selections. Precast is used in the District Hall with clear glass. Reflective performance glass is proposed in the lab building/tower with silver mullions to mimic the precast. Peng Gu reviewed the plant palette proposed for the site before Will continued with the preliminary signage and night images highlighting the use of exterior lighting.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the presentation and asked questions relating to the use/placement of brick pavers, topography within the plaza, existing sidewalk conditions on adjacent sites, and the proposed signage.

Site:

- The change in the ground plane proposed along MLK seems very abrupt. Find ways to simplify the approach so that the relationships to both the building and to each other is more clear.
- Revisit the proposed fixed furniture and refine the circular paving approach to help provide more clarity to the movement through the space and a clear sense of direction towards the entry recessed deep into the site.
- The Mews/drop-off space needs refinement and additional development to act as a major entrance into the phase I and II buildings. Explore ways to better screen the back of the firehouse building as it interfaces with the drop-off.
- Refine the extents of the plaza carpet treatment. It may want to pull back and be used to connect from Freemont to the corner of MLK and Baltimore St. and allow the MLK frontage to be developed as a sophisticated urban streetscape.
- Eliminate the bench around the first tree along Baltimore Street as part of a solution so those trees act as a filter to the social spaces more internal to the space.

Building:

- The edits and update to the architecture at the base are very well received.
- The proposed signage design, outside of the large BioPark generic signage at the top of the building, seems very purposeful and designed within the aesthetic of the overall project. Re-evaluate the generic/large signage at the top of the building to be purposeful and carefully selected to be reduced to what is needed for visibility only.
- Continue to pursue the differentiation of the glazing in the main tower elements – as rendered, they are too close/similar and should be more different.
- Continue developing the drop off approach from Freemont. With most people walking across and entering this portion of the site from the parking garage, this area need to be more reflective of an extension of the main plaza in terms of arrival.
- Investigate ways to relate the side of the firehouse (in color or material) within the plaza or within the entry into the restaurant.

Next Steps:

Continue the design development of this project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Gregg Herlong, Caroline Moore – Wexford

Will Robertson, Jonah Schar – ZGF

Jane Shaab – UMB

Susan Williams - STV

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

Anthony Cataldo* – Planning