

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

Date: May 21, 2020

Meeting #44

Project: Woodland Gardens – Phase I

Phase: Schematic I

Location: 4701-4755 Park Heights Ave.

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Ellen Jarrett from CHAI gave a brief introduction and noted the project will be part of a twin 4% and 9% tax credit deal. The senior building (Phase II) is expected to begin construction in the summer, and this phase (Phase I), which is a 60-unit family building, is slated for construction to begin spring of 2022.

Melanie Voeker of Human and Rohde, Inc. continued the presentation with an overview of the site and neighborhood context. The building is located on a large irregular parcel within the MRA footprint. The site is shared by both phases and will have two similarly scaled buildings when all phases are complete. Austin Bruns of Architecture by Design continued the presentation with an explanation of the architectural approach.

Specifics to note:

- The site is zoned R-10 along Park Heights Ave, and R-4 at Woodland and Delaware Ave.
- Sanitary sewer in existing alley between Park Heights and Delaware Ave. will remain – building setback is 30’ min.
- Large site will have buildings located toward Park Heights Ave. with green space behind; outdoor amenities will be shared between the family and senior buildings.
- Comment from previous UDAAP about the 30’ wide “courtyard” between the buildings was noted - the team conducted a study to look at how the sun reaches the ground in that space.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the project team for the presentation and asked clarifying questions before continuing with discussion.

- *The Panel provided comments for the site; how has the team addressed the overall site strategy?* The building orientation has not changed; nor has the site changed much. Some clarifications with the fence enclosure were made, and the dumpster enclosure has moved toward the back of the site.

- *What is the intended program for just inside the building, entering from the rear courtyard?* Community space, leasing offices, are located off the lobby, but the wings are residential units and some utility / mechanical space.
- *What drove the decision for programming in the courtyard elements?* No resident input, but this is intended to be a very family friendly space.
- *Are the playgrounds intended to be public?* While the site will be private, it will not be gated. The intent is to invite community to use the site, as well.
- *Streetscape improvements – are these by the developer or by the City?* These will be by the developer.
- *Is Delaware a one-way or two-way street?* Two way.
- *What is meant by a dumpster corral?* It is space to hold the dumpster within an enclosure; the dumpster or trash cans will be picked up by a truck.
- *Where is the accessible entrance?* In the rear of the building; a person arriving from the bus would have to use the space between the buildings (the “courtyard”) to reach the rear (parking lot) side and enter through the main (rear) entrance.
- *Who is the courtyard intended for?* Mostly residents, but it will be open. It is not intended for cut-through foot traffic by non-residents.
- *What are the main hierarchical elements of the site and pathways – important views and activities?* Green space has a strong relationship to the neighborhood, strong axis of paths, and buildings oriented on Park Heights Ave.

Site – General:

- Regardless of which phase is implemented first, the site needs to be addressed holistically. The team is expected to bring previous comments into the project as it moves forward.
- Organization and hierarchy of the site would have been better served diagrammatically; difficult to reconcile these elements without first studying how they work together functionally.
- Both projects need to be considered on one site; as designed, the buildings don’t yet respond to each other or the site. Begin with a diagram to explain the rationale of how the buildings are sited and how they respond to each other.
- Playgrounds, gardens, pavilions are so far removed from the buildings and so prominent at the corner that these feel like a public amenity that residents are allowed to use. These do not read as amenities *for* the residents – they are too disconnected from building and not spatially situated to be connected. These elements need additional consideration about who they are supposed to serve.

- Organization seems arbitrary – adjacencies need to be rethought with consideration for how things are used.
- Kit of parts is well-intentioned but need to take a moment to consider relationships with the greater community (look at it from the outside in, as well as from the inside out) – opportunity to connect more meaningfully with the neighborhood and the new development planned for across Park Heights Ave.
- If designed from the outside in, Park Heights Ave. will be how people arrive at the site.
- Not all four corners are the same; Park Heights Ave. is very urban. Corners anchor the block, and the outermost edges will make the block feel complete and give it hierarchy.
- Consider sightlines – play areas so far from the living areas and evergreens screening from the building; need comfort level of being able to see into the space from the building.
- Layout should identify the private, semi-private, semi-public and public spaces; currently site plan does not clearly identify those spaces. The team needs to establish clear, easily legible zones. Zones need to be extraordinarily clear to maintain a sense of safety and comfort for residents.
- Small details can help to resolve some of the ambiguity of the site. Examples – bench placement, understanding who is coming to the site, what are they doing there, what is the throughway, are the spaces comfortable for the intended use, and are there pinch points that need to be eliminated, etc.
- Civic expression should occur at the public side.

Site – Parking Lot:

- Vehicular and pedestrian circulation – curved drive aisle is awkward and problematic.
- Site layout should also be considered in terms of use and layering; designed as a formal construct, but actually problematic when studied for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Maybe doesn't want to be axial – pedestrian crossing could be off to one side (safer).
- Please reconsider relationship of building, parking, gazebo on a central axis. Central crosswalk is the first point of conflict; then there is a long, vegetated path through the parking lot and another crossing point before reaching the amenity spaces. Condense parking rather than taking people through it – more humane way to get people through is via the shortest points near the rain gardens, etc.
- There is a more efficient way to lay the parking lot out in order to bring some of the amenities closer to the building, making them feel intended for the residents (instead of public) and push the parking back a bit.
- Opportunity to move parking nearer Delaware Ave., dumpster and entry points. This would free up the space near the building to create truly intergenerational outdoor amenities that feels more intimate and more deliberately for the residents.

- The buildings are laid out as two identical elements with the parking as the spine of the project. If this is not addressed, the parking will continue to dominate and drive the design.

Site – Courtyards and Entrances:

- Rear (parking lot side) courtyard is neither active nor passively peacefully – as designed this is just a paved space. If it is an oasis, then allow it to be a garden; if it is meant to be programmed, then it needs more specific elements.
- Front courtyard on Park Heights Ave. is very near the residential units – to maintain an appropriate sense of privacy, an appropriate buffer of vegetation is needed.
- Park Heights Ave. entrance is not the main entrance, which creates a challenge. Sending people with mobility challenges to the rear is a very dated conception – team is encouraged to find a way of making a graceful and dignified accessible route to the Park Heights side entrance.
- Consider flipping the entrance to make Park Heights Ave. the main entrance. Allow the courtyard to be a figural element and study the two buildings together to enliven the street front.
- The gap between the two buildings is problematic. No threshold encourages public traffic through the block despite the fact these abut private residential units. Also, there are already 4 courtyards, and these are controlled through the access of the building. Sets up an unsafe situation – if fenced, the area between the buildings could still function as an amenity for the residents, but would also read as a resident-controlled, interior, semi-private realm.
- Reconsider the space between the building – it will not be well used and invites cut-through. Creating a safety and convenience problem.

Building:

- As designed, both buildings use the same architectural language. Colors differentiate the tops of the building, but the bases are too similar.
- The buildings are similarly proportioned and make up the full block – they already read as a pair. Consider contrasting the buildings to each other, instead of between the base and top of the Phase I building. Phase II building has a unified read because of the low contrast between base and top – consider applying this logic to the Phase II building by keeping the darker color and bringing it to the base.
- Color schemes – darker color gives the Phase I building a lot of contrast. Study changing the base, to maintain the identity without matching it to the Phase II building.

- The design is not taking full advantage of Park Heights Ave. – the formal monumental configuration on Park Heights Ave. reads as the front and will benefit the development if it is treated as such.
- Team needs to consider that only half the residents will be using the parking lot. New building should be forward-looking and respond to the building planned for across the street.
- Something more specific needs to happen on the Woodland corner to give it an identity.
- The team has the pieces – the project is a kit of parts. The key now is to bring it together.

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing comments above.

Attending:

Carla Ryon, Aliza Hertzmark – CMR Engineers

Ellen Jarrett – CHAI

Melanie Voelker, Devin Leary – Human and Rohde, Inc.

Judi Miller, Austin Bruns – Architecture By Design

Desiree Eades, Bobby Mason – Attendees

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

Kelly Baccala – DHCD

Laurie Feinberg*, Ren Southard, James Ashford, Chris Ryer – Planning