

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

Date: May 21, 2020

Meeting #34

Project: Old Town Redevelopment

Phase: Master Plan

Location: 500 N. Gay Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Dana Henson introduced the project and team. The intent of this project is to create a “neighborhood of choice” – a 21st century version of the original intent of the historic development. Donald Kann of STV Architects continued the presentation beginning with urban context and existing building conditions. Kristen Gedeon gave an overview of circulation around the site and Mr. Kann added the historical context. Old Town is the 7th public market to have been built in the City; in 1976 the street was closed to vehicular traffic and buildings were redeveloped at that time; however, the site has been in a period of decline since then. Existing conditions are a mix of cleared sites and buildings in need of repair.

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 asked clarifying questions. It was noted that the master plan area is not large, but the immediate context is very complex and needs more analysis. To understand nuances of the space, integration of neighborhood and rationale for conceptual site plan, diagrammatic analysis is necessary. Complexities need to be studied – exploration of mass, density, circulation, front and back of buildings, arrival, function, etc. will help to explain design decisions. Intent needs to guide site organization and relate back to immediate context.

Site:

- Needs more strategic approach; currently the open space feels leftover and amorphous.
- Buildings have an opportunity to better relate to context or transition to surrounding neighborhoods.

- Locate the programmatic elements by starting not with the new street, but with the Old Town Mall pedestrian street and the new developments outside of the site footprint (Somerset, Perkins).
- Dense urban area requires place-making; this project can build on the essence of what is already there. Best location for the market needs to be studied and site organization will follow.
- Key considerations for locating uses comes from use, access, primary / secondary streets, etc. Revisit street grid, intersections – justification for arch in new Forrest Street has not been identified.
- Highlight or downplay historic elements will help to organize the site, as well as access points into and out of the site. Diagramming all of these elements will present a clear framework for organizing the site and provide options.
- Sizes of streets, parking, program placement, spaces all need to be justified – character is developed from function, intent, context, etc. but these have not been expressed in this presentation.
- Opportunity for a direct link from the history to the current design – what things from the past have influenced the space in an inspirational, intentional way?
- Pedestrian experience and sequences have not been articulated deliberately; circular elements create awkward spaces that leave pedestrians in-between. Less complicated buildings can help to organize the space – buildings are competing instead of making a cohesive space.
- Scale is important to liveliness of the space – buildings that are too big will encroach on the space and stifle activity. Widening spaces can be exciting and give moments of relief with careful planning.
- Plants will need to be introduced to combat linear sterile feeling – vegetation does not necessarily need to be trees; could be container gardens or other plantings to introduce lushness.
- Extremely important that design begins with urban fabric: study of linear buildings, industrial buildings, Somerset mixed use, etc. Site is not necessarily the “hole in the doughnut” – need to understand that this project will create new context.
- Reconsider the nature and purpose of the proposed street. Cut-through vehicular traffic could potentially stifle the continuity of the public space experience unless integrated into the urban fabric. Specific definition is needed – street used for block-making and is therefore an urban street with layers of movement or it is a vehicular-centered drive that meanders through amorphous open space and the underpass.
- Study and incorporate analysis of pedestrian malls that have experiences success in current times and identify potential challenges common to this type of open space.

Buildings:

- Hotel: large frame building is out of place – larger, taller mass belongs on Ensor Street, and can help to mitigate light industrial across the street. Taller mass could step down toward the pedestrian mall.
- Market building: analyze the building for its use first, and stay away from the circle before making a decision about the architecture of the market building. Begin with something more generic as the urban issues are explored. Needs to be quieted down and ok for it to be an idea for now.
- Leave the buildings as very diagrammatic now – focus on the spaces and leave the architecture out for now. Stick to conceptual diagrams to help first organized the site.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Dan Henson, Dana Henson, Del Henson – Henson Development

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

Judi Miller, Austin Bruns – Architecture By Design

Ron Bedford, Precious Washington, Arlisa Anderson, Melody Simmons (BBJ) – Attendees

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

Lembit Jogi, Kevin Gallaher, Jaye Matthews – HABC

Laurie Feinberg*, Ren Southard, Tamara Woods, Marshella Wallace, Martin French, Matt DeSantis, Stephanie Smith – Planning