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

**Date:** November 15, 2018 **Meeting #10**

**Project:** 520 Somerset Apartment Building **Phase:** Design Development

Beatty Dev./ Commercial Dev./ The Henson Dev. Co./ Mission First Housing

**Location:** 520 Somerset Street, Baltimore, MD

**PRESENTATION:**

A brief overview and summary of status of the development was provided by Ms. Dana Henson of the Henson Development Company. She referenced the greater community including Old Town Mall and Johns Hopkins as well as other key centers and businesses. She also noted the importance of 520 Somerset as part of a larger development that includes a new central park, all centrally located to the greater community. Andrea Drake and Peng Gu from the design team of Moseley Architects and Mahan Rykiel, presented updates to the site and building design and responses to previous panel review comments.

Peng Gu described 5 zones of the streetscape that relate to the building functions: public, semi-pubic, garage and two types of private zones. The public zone located at the corner of Mc Elderry and Somerset anticipates high pedestrian traffic so foundation plantings are minimized to allow wide sidewalks relating to the more pubic/retail uses in this part of the building. Curb edge semi-transparent trees as well as some ground cover is contained within a 4'-0" tree planting zone. The semi-public zone located along the northern segment of Somerset, adds a narrow foundation planting zone, 8'-0" sidewalk, and continues a 4'-0" curb edge tree zone with softer materials and fountain grass. The garage entry zone utilizes planting at the building foundation to expand sight lines for vehicles leaving the garage. The private zones extend along Aisquith, part of Mc Elderry and Jefferson and at the corner of Somerset and Jefferson near the building's main residential entry. Sidewalks vary between 4'-0" and 6'-0", curb edge tree zones are maintained and more generous foundation planting is added for privacy along the ground floor residential units.

Andrea Drake noted the building palette of brick and fiber cement panels. She stated that along Somerset, brick volumes are used to anchor corners and frame main residential entry. This continues on the Mc Elderry elevation but introduces more expansive use of fiber cement panel (FCP) to transition to a taller building segment along Asquith. In contrast to Somerset, the Asquith elevation modulates between equal volumes of brick and FCP with the FCP treatment expanding across the secondary entry near the center of the façade. Jefferson presents a transition of building height and language from Asquith and Somerset. There is an overall interplay of volumes using a vocabulary building elements that changes from elevation to elevation. Color accent and signage is added to the main residential entry and lighting is being considered to enhance streetscape.

**Comments from the Panel:**

Site:

The panel thanked the design team for presenting the building with proposed designs for the adjacent park along Somerset. They noted the importance of relating the site and street articulation along Somerset to the park design.

While the approach taken to implement incremental design within discrete zones is generally successful as it gives attention to discrete areas that reflect the changing conditions around the building, the panel felt that along Somerset, sidewalk treatment should consider the treatment along the park edge as well, including tree scape, park entries and park activities. For instance, the sidewalk segment between the building entry and the crosswalk at Somerset and Jefferson that provides access to the park. The panel suggested minimizing planting in this area to provide a more generous sidewalk that acknowledges the connection to the park, and discourages mid-block crossing.

Further refinement to the garage zone to improve sightlines should be explored. This may include adding cues and shaping the planting zone in a manner that calls pedestrian's attention to the zone where traffic crosses the sidewalk.

Building:

The panel welcomed the design team's steps to respond to previous comments and refine the building design. Using brick volumes to bookend the facades is positive, in particular the Somerset elevation. Further refinement of the east elevation should include expanding the brick volume located at the north end of the Somerset façade to include and tie in one additional brick bay. This anchors the north and south ends of this façade and provides visual balance with three centralized brick bays adjacent to the entry. Color accent is welcomed at the main residential entry, but more study is encouraged to make the entry volume more legible and pronounced. Explore bringing color into other areas of the entry. Consider expanding color into the canopy.

The treatment of infill panels is a design improvement and using the same material to define the attic story on the taller building volumes is seen as successful. Articulation near the center of the facades is still a bit confusing. Along Somerset, brick volumes alternate with infill panels but are taller than bays of infill panels. At Mc Elderry, infill panels from the taller volume seem to nest between brick bays, but bay windows of the same infill material pop out beyond the brick plane. The transition between the brick corner and the taller volume should be simplified by articulating windows in a single plane and a single material to unify the façade to read more legibly. Consider a more regular roof line along Somerset to ease the transition to Mc Elderry and avoid two steps between the corner and transition up to the taller volume at the west end of the façade.

Along Asquith, the panel recognized the design team's challenge to break down volumes given the scale and extents of the facades, but felt that further moves to simplify the arrangement of elements is needed. The panel suggested setting up a simple A-B-C approach for the three primary elements, brick, infill panel and bay windows. Consider the brick as a primary volume (A) that holds a regular and continuous datum around all facades; and the infill panel as a secondary (B) alternating with the brick in some facades, and used as a transition for changes in height and planes in other facades; and bay windows (C) used as accents to further break down volumes. The panel noted that by organizing volumes in this manner facades will become more legible and present the building in a more distinct character. The panel also suggested a slightly darker hue for the attic element and strengthening of the building's main entry.

**Next Steps:**

The project will advance to Design Development Review addressing the comments above.

**Attending:**

Peng Gu – Mahan Rykiel
Susan Williams – STV
Dana Henson, Dan Henson – The Henson Development Co.
Kevin Gallaher, Lembit Jogi – HABC
Magda Westerhout, Andrea Drake, Maja Tokic – Moseley Architects

Mr. Anthony*, Mses. Wagner, O'Neill and Ilieva - UDAAP Panel

Laurie Feinberg, Anthony Cataldo, Christina Hartsfield - Planning