

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

Date: May 24, 2018

Meeting #3

Project: 520 Somerset Apartment Building

Phase: Schematic

Location: 520 Somerset Street, Baltimore, MD

PRESENTATION:

A project overview was provided by Ms. Dana Henson of the Henson Development Company, who noted that 520 Somerset is centrally located to many community amenities and there is a desire to have the project fit into the fabric of the surrounding community. The development is one part of a masterplan to restore the street grid around Somerset Street, and use the planned open space/park in front of the development as a connection to the community.

The project's design team of Moseley Architects and STV, reviewed relevant elements of the design discussed at the last presentation, and provided updates to the last presentation. These include:

- Locating 2500 square feet of ground floor retail at the corner of Somerset and Mc Elderry Streets
- Providing the ground floor apartments off Mc Elderry and Aisquith Streets with sidewalk entries
- Providing more detail at the ground floor interior courtyard
- Providing more detail of exterior elevations, massing and materials
- Adding some landscaping at the building line, although it was noted that landscaping in the public ROW will be by a separate consultant

Comments from the Panel:

Site:

An overall site plan that organized the site and context elements in a comprehensive manner was missing. The panel noted the importance of, and need for a site plan to properly communicate the design; and relate building massing and planned site features with the surrounding context, including the planned park east of the site. Also stressed by the panel was the site plan's usefulness to clarify and identify private apartment sidewalk entries, the main entrance and retail frontage, all of which help define the character of the building and the block.

The panel requested a site plan layout of the open space/park to clarify the placement of the main entrance located within the southern third of the Somerset block between Mc Elderry and Jefferson Streets.

Sidewalk and street improvements throughout the site are becoming critically important as multiple buildings and programs are now being reviewed for this area and must be addressed at the next meeting. In terms of this specific building proposal, sidewalk and street improvements at the parking entrance off Jefferson Street, should consider pedestrian safety from vehicles entering and leaving the parking garage and work collectively to identify features of the building/relate to the mass and context.

Building:

The panel acknowledged that programmatic requirements resulted in a building footprint that occupies the entire block, but expressed a preference for more articulation along the ground floor units to provide some degree of privacy to the residential uses. The private entries were viewed as positive as they added a more residential character to the apartment building, although more development is required to tie entries to landscape and streetscape. The panel asked the design team to revisit the courtyard size and width as it seemed a bit narrow compared with the number of stories surrounding the outdoor space.

The panel appreciated the design team's awareness to use massing and materials to break down the longer east and west elevations and tie the four-story block along Somerset Street with the five-story block along Aisquith Street. The designers' intent to provide a coherent architectural expression of all facades was thoughtful but the panel expressed a few considerations.

Visually the arrangement of taller vertical brick elements with oversized and punched windows contrasted with the adjacent flat planar façade expression, along the Somerset elevation, appeared busy with a kind of sameness. The designers should consider taking advantage of the height change of elements to tie and track volumes in plan with elevation; and to define 3-dimensional volumes around the building. Consider treating as three to four distinct volumes and avoid excessive repetition of a single language which will not break up the mass successfully.

Alternatively, along Somerset, consider combining the vertical brick elements north of the entrance into a single volume, and balance that mass with the brick volume south of the entrance by building around the symmetry of the entrance. With such an arrangement, the north corner can be viewed as a unique element of the same materiality as the four story segment of the north elevation along McElderry.

The panel also discussed program shifts that may better align with the overall activation plan for the area. Consider moving the main entrance north towards the proposed 1234 McElderry Street project along with programming the 'active' portion of the proposed park on the north end as well. This may allow for the collective retail, main residential entrances, and main pedestrian future connection towards to east (JHU) to be strengthened and to capture the energy in the most impactful way with limited retail proposed in the new buildings. The more 'passive' park space would then shift towards the south and could be anchored by the future Building 3 as it holds the corner of Central Ave and the newly created street.

Three-dimensional views of prototypical elements should be provided at future reviews along with an overall material and color palette that takes on a specific direction.

Next Steps:

Review and address comments above with continued Schematic Level review.

Attending:

Dana Henson, Daniel Henson – The Henson Corporation, Inc.

Chris Everett – Mission First Housing

Magda Westerhout, Andrea Drake – Moseley Architects

Susan Williams – STV

Lembit Jogi - HABC

Messrs. Anthony*, Ostovar, Mses. Walker, O'Neill, and Ilieva - UDAAP Panel

Anthony Cataldo, Christina Hatfield, Director Tom Stosur, Matthew DeSantis, Tamara Woods - Planning