

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

**Date:** April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Meeting #15**

**Project:** James Mosher

**Phase: Discussion #1**

**Location:** MLK and Lexington Street, Baltimore MD

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Gavin Meyers of Hughes Group Architects presented the project, a school renovation with a 12,000 square foot addition. The project is being designed by the Joint Venture of Walden Studio Architects and Hughes Group Architects. MK Consulting Engineers provide the engineering and landscape architecture is by Michael Norton Land Design.

The project will consolidate the Alexander Hamilton and Mosher schools to accommodate students from Pre-K to 2. The overall site is about 6.1 acres. And the school site occupies about 2.8 acres south of the little league baseball field. Mr. Meyers noted that the project will strive to apply 21<sup>st</sup> century design principles, improve site security and enhance pedestrian connection between Mosher and Calverton schools. Entrance and façade improvements are also planned.

He presented a site concept that provides enhanced connectivity to Calverton using site features between Calverton and James Mosher; introduces a green area at the interior court defined by the existing building and addition, to replace existing pavement; provides staff parking at the northwest (NW) corner of the site. The concept also added a promenade at the southern edge of the ballfield to tie the playground area with the school site. Other site improvements included making provisions for storm water by adding micro bio-retention and green space that define site circulation, as well as shade trees to define the edge of site.

The design team is also evaluating the asphalt area north of the school building, the promenade and paved outdoor area of the existing school yard. Concepts evaluated contemplate:

- Maintaining a 10'-0" wide walk; reducing parking and including a canopy; adding a community quad but allowing access between building, play areas and park, while introducing gathering space enclosed with trees and planting.
- Providing a circulation ribbon to define a pedestrian experience that opens up into a larger outdoor green area for student use; and creating smaller spaces for supervised breakout sessions, but functionally supporting pockets for storm water facilities; and
- Developing a free form design, similar to the ribbon concept, but with more hardscape and enclosed space that provides a greater sense of privacy.

The design team noted that the building will include a new gym, cafeteria and food services area. Mr. Meyers noted that there is a strong desire to maintain but improve the existing

auditorium which has fixed seating. One part of the existing school building was built in the 1930s Art Deco style and the other part constructed in the 1955. The building is two stories and situated on a flat site. The school program is fit into the existing building massing and new addition. The main entrance is through the existing 1950's building entrance that references the language of the 1930's façade. The design team noted that the historic architectural entry at 1930's façade will not be an entrance, but treated as a unique interior element with glazing that provide a visual connection to an exterior garden.

For the addition, similar materials that include brick and precast elements are used. Pylons are added to identify and mark connections between James Mosher and Calverton to the west.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **Site:**

The panel noted that the organization of program and site elements in a simple manner was a good design approach. They however noted that some elements of the design still lacked clarity based on a number of competing factors including: the existing building character and siting of its main entries, the location of drop off zones and the building with its four sides having prominent views from the public realm.

They questioned the bus drop off location and its remoteness from Pre-K classrooms. The design team noted that it was coordinated with school officials and it relates to how students are processed. The panel also asked for further study of the entry node at the west end of the N. Promenade and street crossing at N. Warwick Street, as features are being considered to strengthen connections between Calverton and James Mosher schools.

The panel recommended that the design team use landscaping to resolve the challenge of the service area as a frontal condition within direct view of the street. Similarly provide more screening of the parking area. The addition of street trees was viewed as positive for the site and its relationship to the urban edge.

The panel asked the design team to consider allowing the site to act as a connective tissue that helps define specific zones and inform the hierarchy of the entries. They suggested that the bus drop off area start a bit closer to the corner and landscaping be introduced in a connective manner that relates more closely to the bus drop off area and the parent drop off area. They noted that the landscaped areas should engage each other and define the Mosher Street side as the front lawn of the school. By shifting the bus drop off area, it creates an opportunity to shift the service gate with its curb cut and opens up the entry to the east-west promenade. This decompression will introduce a more generous entry that marks the connection between Mosher and Calverton. The panel asked for further study of the pedestrian connection between entries and staff parking, perhaps by adding walkways to make connections more direct and intuitive, to avoid unintended "cow paths".

The panel appreciated the studies presented related to the outdoor learning area and moves made with landscaped zones adjacent to the promenade. They recommended articulating this zone as a transitional space to express the connection between the school building and areas planned for outdoor learning activities; and as vestibule between the school and the play area

fields. They noted that spaces suggested for outdoor learning should be defined and not seem residual off the circulation path, whether it's a design that is free-flowing and amoebic or one that's more formal.

The panel encouraged the design team to obtain more information on the operational and organizational plans that determine arrival and departure protocols. This information should be used to inform landscaping and hardscaping decisions at entries.

### **Building:**

The panel welcomed most of the major design moves made across the project and the steps taken to tie the schools together. They believed that the enhanced landscaping and open space is a wonderful benefit to the community. Organizing the program in a simple, direct manner and creating a promenade to link the many spaces is sound design approach. The idea to rework the entrance in a more architecturally prominent manner to celebrate its relationship to Mosher Street was viewed as positive. Secondary elements that support the main moves are not sufficiently developed. For instance, while the addition may fulfill its functional and programmatic objectives, it reads like service program just added to the existing building. Its architecture seems less honorific and could be better articulated in a manner that complements the more dignified elements of the existing architecture.

The panel had varied observations of the building entrances. While the main entry off Mosher Street was presented as improved in a language referential of the 1930s entry, there was a lack of visual clarity and hierarchy of the many entries. Also, of the three entries, the most prominent one is not used. The design presented similar street conditions on two streets with drop offs and entries; but a very different condition on the third street where there is no drop off and the entry is closed, although it reads like a primary entrance by virtue of the prominent historic architecture.

Open up entry to outdoor garden to restore the dignity of the historic building entry in contrast to the main entry along Mosher Street.

### **Next Steps:**

Discussion Only.

### **Attending:**

Gavin Meyers, Christa Kerringan, Jennifer Birks - Hughes Group/Waldon Studio Joint Venture  
Marianne Crampton - MK Consulting  
Tyler Dumont - MSA  
Michael Morton, Hyungjoon Choi - Norton Land Design

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

Anthony Cataldo, Christina Hartsfield, Laurie Feinberg, Chad Hayes, Jennifer Leonard - Planning