

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

Date: February 14, 2019

Meeting #13

Project: Port Covington – Rye Street Market

Phase: Schematic

Developer: Weller Development

Location: E7 – 11 Rye Street, Port Covington, Baltimore, MD

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Weller Development’s Jeff Baker introduced the project comprising of retail and offices uses, and part of the Chapter 1, Port Covington development; and the design team of Hoerr Schaudt / MGMA / STV. Gabriella Condrut of the design team MGMA discussed siting and Will McBeth of MGMA discussed the building architecture.

The proposal arranged four multi-story buildings around a central open space referred to as “Market Square”. The four buildings front onto the adjoining streets, Rye Street, Cromwell Street, Distillery Street and Atlas Street, and are separated by breezeways between each building that connect the market square to the respective streets. Building A, B/C, D and E occupy the corners of the block. An access point to the market square from Rye Street picks up on a lobby entry in the proposed mixed use development west of this site. The access from Atlas favors the eastern third of the façade based on program in building E. Access from Cromwell Street is angled away from mid-block and directed to the park across Cromwell Street. The irregular market square configuration was used to set off a layering of spaces, a dynamic interplay of inward looking exterior walls set in different planes that frame an irregular shaped courtyard to create “Market Square”. The design team noted this as a deliberate move to avoid the space being used as a cut through.

The four building masses show in multiple architectural languages: a warehouse style building clad to recall maritime structures; a five story brick structure with fenestration that recalls daylight factory building from the turn-of-the-century (early 1900s); and multi-story steel frame structure clad with metal panel and glass.

DISCUSSION:

Urban Connection and Residual Spaces

The panel questioned the validity of identifying the outdoor space framed by the proposed buildings, as a market square. The panel cautioned that the space as configured, both in scale and use, did not successfully or accurately convey the idea of a market. However, if other reasons (marketing, business etc) are drivers for the title, then more consideration should be given to making the corner massing more prominent and befitting of “Market Square”. Misaligning access points on opposite sides of the square isn’t an issue as a composition. The panel noted that as a design decision, the rationale that misaligning access points will deter pass through pedestrian traffic, isn’t strong or accurate. If pedestrians see the square as a convenient short cut, it will be so used. Offsetting entry and exit points will not deter pedestrians from the taking a “short-cut”. The panel also noted that aligning the Rye Street entry to the

square with the lobby across Rye Street invites the potential for mid-block uncontrolled crossing, and it should be addressed.

The asymmetric shape of the central open space would typically be deemed as residual based on the juxtaposition of surrounding buildings. This proposal presents an arrangement that is bound by a rigid grid external to the development site, yet no element of the immediate urban context provides a clue or cue to the shaping of the internal open space. The idea of the square is welcoming, although more study is needed to validate entry points, in particular the entry from Cromwell Street. The panel recommended avoiding the angled entry in favor of a straight rectilinear entry. This will validate the square as an open space framed by building masses. It will also allow an enlarging of the massing of building A. This move will capture and represent the signature idea of the Rye Street Market as an anchor to the area.

Connection to the greater urban realm is important. While the open park is a special urban feature and amenity to the area, it isn't the central and only focus of Port Covington. The waterfront is probably more important and may be of more value. The street network is equally important as it physically connects and stitches together the unique urban features and development parcels. The open square at the Rye Street Market is a unique urban feature and it should be celebrated as such. Its size and scale seem to place it more in the realm of discovery than a central open and outward looking space, like the park. Instead it is inward looking and more intimate. Discovery of the market square through entry portals accessed from the planned street network is a powerful and unique urban expression – the only one so far in Port Covington. The enlarged Rye Street Market building will relate directly to the park being across the street from it. This positioning affords a more generous street wall along Cromwell Street and better completes the corner. It will also overcome the seemingly idiosyncratic moves of angling the access from Cromwell Street and anointing it with oversized arches.

Building Massing and Use

The panel appreciated the idea of the market building and an expression of steel frames with oversized glass panels which are appropriate for the anchor use anticipated. They encourage the design team to strongly consider using retail along Cromwell Street to build mass along that façade by removing the angled access point and relocate it east and realign it to be rectilinear. Combine building A and B both in massing and use. Consider it as the signature brand for this building and remove the arches. Continue to look for ways that the building's program and plan engage with the massing of the buildings.

While there is a desire to create separate architectural languages for each building, consider less styles and use less motifs to provide clarity of expression; an abstraction of the architectural motifs is needed.

Next Steps:

Continue in schematic and address the comments noted above.

Attending:

Sean Fefferstan, Hannah Rosenberg, Keith Kobin, Sharon Pula – HCM

Jeff Baker, Alex Laurens, Adam Genn – Weller

Addison Palmer – STV

Wil McBeath, Gabriella Condrut – MGMA

Patrick Terranova - BDC

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

Anthony Cataldo, Laurie Feinberg, Tamara Woods, Matthew DeSantis - Planning