

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: April 21, 2022

Meeting #61

Project: 1300 Greenmount Ave.

Phase: Schematic

Location: 1300 Greenmount Ave., Johnston Square

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Architect Rafi Segal began the presentation by introducing the project team, which includes developer Ernst Valery, architect of record Shamika Godley, and artist Marisa Moran Jahn. The presentation continued with an explanation of the context. The project is located at the busy intersection of Greenmount Avenue and E. Preston Street in the Johnston Square neighborhood. The team utilized the recently accepted Johnston Square Vision Plan (March 2020) as a starting point. The site is located on bus and bicycle routes, and there are recently constructed multi-family buildings near the site including the Lillian Jones senior apartment building – a 4-story wood frame courtyard building with a mix of finishes – across the street. Other nearby buildings include an older apartment building to the south, rowhouses, and warehouses.

The project team looked at incorporating eyes on the street principles and activating the corner through a public / commercial use at the ground floor. The project occupies a nearly square parcel at the corner and unlike its rowhouse neighbors, it attempts to address both the frontage on Greenmount Avenue and on East Preston Street. There are 21 residential units in this building and the program includes housing tenants and their caregivers in one building while providing amenities for all. The building aligns with the neighboring buildings to the north but retreats back from the property line to give more space to the sidewalk and public realm.

The building’s form was manipulated to maximize light and air for the units. Elements from the neighborhood are referenced in the façade: without replicating the rowhouse windows, the basic proportions have been adopted and incorporated in a contemporary way; the ground level façade incorporates a long-standing Baltimore tradition of painted screens with a mesh screen application. The screen creates visual interest and allows for some privacy, illumination, and eyes on the street. The team concluded their presentation with a comment that some of the details are still being worked out, but noted the project was far along in design with much neighborhood support.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the presentation team and proceeded with clarifying questions, followed by comments.

- *The rendering doesn't correspond to the site plan; which is correct?* The site plan is more current; there are two steps up to the front entrance and a ramp to accommodate the grade change. In the rear, the courtyard slopes down to the alley.
- *Community engagement was very impressive. In the process, was there any conversation for engaging the alley with a green alley approach?* The project team has proposed a parklet behind the building (to the west), but there have been site control challenges. There is interest in the Green Alley program.
- *Has the ramp been explored as a more sculptural element that gets extended so the railing can be eliminated?* The team agrees that this is an interesting opportunity, and this can help to cut down on the visual clutter.
- *What is the programming for the courtyard?* It is passive space for the tenants with an immediate link to the common room. These two spaces are envisioned to work together.
- *Are street trees feasible based on your studies?* The team has proposed a continuation of what exists around the site and are in the process of addressing what will be planted in the courtyard, as well confirming the four planters shown in the site plan.
- *Is there a reason that the building faces Greenmount (or the main entrance has been located on Greenmount)?* Yes, Greenmount is the main commercial street, and having the entrance on Greenmount is supported by the community.
- *Have materials been considered and if so, what is proposed for this building?* For the façade the team is considering cement board with the decorative art element being some sort of perforated metal panel.

Site & Building:

- Community engagement effort is very impressive – project team is applauded for the early effort and authentic response to neighborhood comments.
- Panel finds it refreshing to see a project approached with a great deal of care and attention. Baltimore has some disadvantages when it comes to development, as it is considered a subprime market, and these disadvantages are sometimes visible in restrictive design budgets that do not allow for projects to take a truly creative approach.
- Fresh and exciting to see the full potential of the site being explored in this project. It is clear that the team used an approach that led with design and care for the site and addressed the questions of constructability and budget as secondary considerations.
- Grade challenges are noted. It seems the ramp and stair could be avoided by moving the entrance to the corner. It is understood that the team explored this idea, and there was a strong

preference for retail at the corner from the neighborhood, which resulted in the entrance being pushed toward the middle. The Panel encourages the team to revisit the entrance location to minimize the ramp.

- Another option is to step the slab down to accommodate the grade change; since there is not a direct connection between the residential lobby and the retail, a small step in the foundation could eliminate the need for a ramp or step on the exterior – this is a common approach and not excessively expensive to the overall project.
- Understanding that the form is more or less defined by the site and public input, comments will focus on further development – materiality, window arrangement, etc.
 - More focus on the details will be key to delivering the project in its best form; as the project is refined, clarify the attitude of the façades.
 - Now that the form has been developed, there is room to step back and edit the project... metaphor to “shake” the project to let unimportant motifs fall off. Less important motifs can be removed, and stronger ideas can remain.
- Façades in general, with specific attention to the windows -
 - Artful translation of the windows but an additional round of detail and iteration needs to occur – it is clear that the façades need to be further developed;
 - The south side feels like it need more ratio of solid to void in order to achieve the same success shown on the east side facing Greenmount;
 - In general, façades would benefit a more deliberate organization of openings;
 - South elevations of the perimeter and the courtyard differ greatly – the perimeter elevation uses a varied approach to window placement, but the courtyard windows are placed with so much regularity that [the elevation] could belong to a completely different building;
 - Consider aligning windows on the alley-side [flat] elevation instead of the stepped arrangement.
- Art piece has potential to be a lovely addition and elevate the project.
- Panel acknowledges that there are constraints in development including financing, timing, etc. – the review process is intended to help the team produce the best building possible as the project develops. Design team is expected to test the comments and determine which things are feasible and could improve the project.
- Study the indoor / outdoor relationships; how can the design and programming blur the lines between these spaces and make the indoor / outdoor space feel more integrated?
- Hopefully the protective approach taken at the alley will not be necessary in the future. Consider thinking of the protective edge as a temporary condition and responding with a design that addresses the more open future condition.
- Alley greening information is available from Baltimore City DOT.
- As the project develops, there are important moments that can be refined.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Shamika Godley, Rafi Segal, Marisa Moran Jahn – Design Team
Ernst Valery, Dana Valery – Development Team

Messrs. Anthony, Mses. Bradly and Ilieva - UDAAP Panel

Tamara Woods*, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette - Planning