

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

Date: April 15, 2021

Meeting #15

Project: 21st Century Schools- Cross Country

Phase: Schematic

Location: 6100 Cross Country Blvd, Baltimore MD 21215

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Michael McBride introduced the project, which has changed from a renovation project to a replacement due to the location of the existing structure in the flood plain. The Priya Iyer with ATI Inc. continued the presentation with a brief overview of the program (pre-K through 8th grades, serving 725 students) and the site challenges, which include a 500-year flood plain.

Priya then presented the proposed site plan highlighting the circulation of the site and the organization of the building to promote visual connections. Pedestrian access onto the site and into the building was also highlighted. The pedestrian entry points were shifted to avoid the corner at Winner and Taney, which has a significant slope. Stormwater management is used as a way to soften and buffer on the busier streets.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the presentation team and began with clarifying questions before continuing with the general discussion and comments.

- *Is the main entrance going to be the only entrance for students?* There are multiple entry points for students who come from the south of the site – students will not be expected to enter only through the front (north side) of the building.
- *Are the community functions such as the gymnasium available for public use?* Yes, and parking would be in the lot in the northwest corner of the site. The public would need to enter through the front, and that would be controlled access point.
- *Please explain the thinking about the play equipment and how those areas are programmed.* The play equipment and programming are set by schools. There will be an open area / sports court and potentially have a rock-climbing wall. The younger children (below age 12) will have designated play area.

Site:

- In general:
 - Parti and narrative ideas are strong, but the clarity of these ideas has become muddled with the programmatic distribution and massing.

- Approach is very smart and meaningful – the main moves have a lot of promise, but there seems to be a lot of concessions versus utilizing site challenges as design opportunities. The team is in a good position to step back, now that they are program experts, and look at the building holistically.
 - Parti seems to address the site, but does not address the other things that impact the site, such as pedestrian circulation, grade changes, etc. These ideas are interrelated, and inform each other, but it is not clear how the team got from the parti to the design presented today.
 - Site – add color to distinguish sidewalks from green (with two greens – one for general site landscape and the other for stormwater).
- Outdoor Spaces:
 - Extending the play area for the older children is recommended – as designed, this area seems too small.
 - Outdoor learning experience area could be expanded, as could the entry points where they meet the building. Consider integrating the outdoor learning area with the less programmed spaces.
- Circulation:
 - Bus arrival from the west is problematic, as is the vehicular traffic from Pinkney (which is in direct conflict with the bus drop on Cross Country). Revise parking lot to have entry and exit onto Pinkney; this will allow the bus drop to shift west.
 - Main street access is strong and promising until it arrives at the wall of the athletic lockers. It is too powerful to undermine it in this way – does not necessarily need to be an entry, but it should be visual at least. The Winner Ave. site needs more exploration to help reinforce this artery.
 - The first pass with pedestrian and vehicular traffic is mostly successful, but the outlet from the parking lot onto Cross Country Blvd is problematic in that it directly intersects pedestrian traffic on a main artery. Related, the front plaza needs more detail – study the proportions of paving to green, while envisioning what may happen there and creating smaller pockets of space to respond to those uses.

Building:

- From the exterior, the beautiful idea about a “main street” organizing the bars of educational and public-facing program (such as gym) is not obvious, but it could be with very deliberate tweaks to the design.
- The 3-story volume should be massaged for a stronger reading – it should be a pure volume and not broken up; redistribute program as needed to achieve the form.
- Site is large and the building is not – opportunity to mass the building in a more emphatic way with a taller section on Cross Country Blvd. and not fragment things so much.
- Reorganizing the massing could give you a more powerful reading and a better courtyard configuration. Shifting of the program could help the building to relate more to the parti diagram.
- More specificity on a diagrammatic level for the site programming as it relates to the intent of the building. Less shape making, more place making. Let the geometries respond to the site, the building, rather than just drawing shapes in the landscape.

- Spend some time with the gym and residual program to make them one volume. If this can't be achieved, then these need to be micro volumes with the main street driving through.
- Opportunity to rotate the lockers and move the music and art rooms down to create a purer volume reading with the gym.
- Building massing does not yet register the program – lower roof profiles do not seem integrated with the overall building. Revisiting the parti will help clean up the massing and make sense of the program. Compact building on a large site could be a great opportunity for the school and allow it to relate nicely to Cross Country Blvd. and connect to the outdoors in a thoughtful and deliberate way, allowing the rest of the site to be green.
- Crank of the building on Winner Ave. might be unnecessary since it's buried in the landscape away from the street edge and doesn't necessarily relate to the context of the neighborhood.
- Consider revising the orientation of the dining space to activate it and improve the visual connection to the outside and relocate kitchen toward the service area. This can help activate the blank wall along the outdoor play spaces.
- The new building is a real opportunity to make a truly 21st Century School – go back to the goals of 21st Century School and create a vision for the school that relates to the community context.
- Develop a robust strategy – scale, materiality, and how it sits in the landscape. Mass can respect the urban and the natural landscape.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Kristen Gedeon – MK Consulting Engineers

Priya Iyer, Heather Bakhsh – ATI, Inc.

Kate Acker – MSA

Michael McBride – 21st Century Schools

Eli Dunbar, Andrew Jinks – Colimore Architects

Dorothy Hellman, Larry Flynn, Marianne Crampton - Attendees

Messrs. Anthony, Mses. Bradly, Ilieva and O'Neill - UDAAP Panel

Laurie Feinberg, Ren Southard, James Ashford - Planning