

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: April 21, 2022

Meeting #61

Project: 21st Century Schools – Annex at Maree Garnett Farring Elem. School

Phase: Schematic

Location: East Patapsco Ave. at 3rd Street, Baltimore MD

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Ran Ilkovitch of Smolen Emr Ilkovitch began the presentation with a problem statement to address why this annex addition is necessary for the current Maree Garnett Farring Elementary and Middle School. The existing facility is currently at almost 250% of its capacity with more than 700 students. The program will move some of the lower grades (kindergarten and first grade) into the newly renovated annex building with the remaining grades (two through eight) located on a separate but adjacent parcel. The project team has considered input from many stakeholders and residents, which has is reflected in the proposal presented today.

The project includes the restoration of a historic church bounded by E. Patapsco Avenue, 3rd Street, and Cambria Avenue. The existing building will contain a “public” zone of programmed elements that are more community oriented. A new “academic” zone will be added to the rear of the historic church building; this U-shaped classroom bar will wrap the edge of the site. The center of the U-shaped addition will house a protected play court, complete with play structures and a synthetic turf area.

Peter Soprano with Site Resources presented the site plan for the project. The team is dealing with almost 10’ of grade change so ramps, stairs and retaining walls will need to be employed around the site. These hard elements are softened with plantings and shrubs. Species have been selected with regard for height, scale, and ability to thrive on slope. Special attention has been paid to existing trees and the team has planned to preserve as many trees as possible around the site, with new trees added to the north and west to help mitigate the street edge. Required stormwater treatment will serve a dual purpose with educational opportunities; each of the outdoor elements have been designed to encourage play and engaged learning.

Ran Ilkovitch ended the presentation with an explanation of the architecture, which is in the early stages. Building layout and massing have been explored, but the façade and finishes are in their very early stages and subject to change.

DISCUSSION:

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

- *What is the differential between the courtyard and 3rd Street; why not bring the elevator down to 3rd Street to make it more accessible and remove the excessive ramp?* Courtyard occurs at finished floor elevation, which is 10' above 3rd Street. The building does have an elevator, and the building is accessible at the rear with an elevator.
- *Where do people park?* There is street parking for this project.
- *How many students will be outside at any given time?* The team doesn't have an exact answer, but the total capacity is 250 with 3 lunch periods, so 60 -70 students at most will be using this space at once, but the team expects this number to be less.
- *What is the box in the courtyard?* The box shown in the images of the courtyard represents access to a crawl space in the church – it may be removed, but that decision has not been confirmed, hence its inclusion in the images.
- *What is the purpose of the little planted strip on Cambria Street?* There is a small bit of grade change there, and the landscaping is meant to buffer this and mitigate this slight change.
- *How often will people be crossing the Cambria Street to the 2nd – 8th grade building?* There will be very few people crossing the street because the programs are separated by grade. Occasionally, there will be administration staff crossing the street, but it will be limited in number and frequency.

Site:

- The site is very tight and can be very difficult to solve, and the tight footprint could be exacerbated by the topography. Alternatively, the topography may be explored as a design opportunity instead of a simply a constraint.
- Taking the building down to 3rd Street will relieve the need for the insane ramp. This could become a very elegant entrance that reinforces. A ramp of this magnitude should be a last resort – as designed, the ramp undermines the building restoration. There must be a different solution.
- An elevator is a much more efficient solution than the ramp; excavation can also allow for programming on the 3rd Street side of the building to occur at grade. There is already almost a full story at 10' grade change, anyway. Resolving this is the most important challenge and will make a world of difference to the project. Additional program at grade will enliven the block and make a friendlier building.
- Finally, Panel suggests even exploring an outdoor lift. A lift would be better than the ramp; the ramp must be a last resort for this project.

Building & Play Courtyard:

- Examples of past play projects are appreciated, and the Panel believes these past projects are well-used as noted by the presentation team, but this site offers an opportunity to have more exposure to a truly outdoor experience. There is potential to design a thriving environment with trees and natural landscape.
- Code recommendation is 75 square feet per child for play space. This is the bare minimum, and even if the courtyard play space presented today meets that minimum, it's surrounded by tall walls. Little ones need sunlight and openness.
- What the team presented is beautifully programmed, but spatially, more is needed. Provide for more in terms of openness, access to natural elements.
- Play area having enough space will be difficult to achieve with this massing approach and the courtyard nestled between the buildings. Explore stacking the program to create a partial third story, which would alleviate some of the cramped-in feeling of the site. As designed, the site feels very packed in, but the slope and square footage challenges could be addressed by arranging program vertically.
- Try creating a very simple volume tucked into the site; a three-story bar would give more distance to the church while relieving more of the site for outdoor programming. Additionally, a compact vertical massing could give more room for the entry and outdoor experience.
- The new addition has a very tiny entrance tucked into what feels like the rear of the building – this arrival moment is an important point for kids. It is the first educational experience for these students outside the home. Explore ways to make this entrance feel more deliberate and important.
- Team is encouraged to explore a 3-part parti with the existing building - the entry, outdoor and a more condensed 3-story bar.
- Connection to the existing church could be improved. The sensitive touch point between the buildings needs a more deliberate approach.
- Define what is circulation versus what is programmed area – this will allow the connection to be minimized. Treat the connection between the buildings as a hyphen between the old and new. Minimizing the connection will also allow the play area to become more transparent and extend to the edge of the building.
- Be very selective about the connection – consider making this a breezeway. The buildings have an opportunity to complement each other instead of fighting and crashing into each other. This complimentary moment can be achieved if the connection is executed more elegantly.
- Consider finding precedents where there is old and new – there are many museums that have addressed similar challenges with elegant solutions that the team can look to.
- Not sure how fenestration will be addressed as the building progresses, but it needs more study. Eager to see the direction – simple is ok, but the images shown are not quite realistic with how minimal they are.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Ran Ilkovitch – Smolen Emr Ilkovitch

Peter Soprano – Site Resources

Maurice Gaskins – City Schools

Cyndi Smith, Rochelle Cusimano, Brandon Brooks - Attendees

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

Tamara Woods*, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette - Planning