

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: April 21, 2022

Meeting #61

Project: 21st Century Schools – Furley Elementary School

Phase: Schematic

Location: 4633 Furley Ave, Baltimore MD

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Paul Bradshaw of Grimm + Parker introduced the project and team. The project scope includes a full replacement of the elementary school (approximately 85,000 GSF) and recreation center. The new building is located at the intersection of Furley and Sippel Avenues.

Kristen Gedeon of MK Consulting continued the presentation with a detailed look at the landscape design. The project team has addressed comments the previous presentation including key points about site circulation (pedestrian and vehicular), plantings, separation of programmed elements and integrating the building with the landscape. The site circulation has been reorganized into primary, secondary and tertiary paths that relate to the entrances and help clarify how students and visitors move about the site. Additionally, the team considered how the landscape might reinforce the educational and play programming and better integrate the building into the neighborhood context.

The many elements addressed in the team’s presentation include:

- School building at the north edge of the site;
- Recreation center to the northwest, attached to the school;
- Bus staging area, parking lot with approximately 70 spaces, a hardscaped play court, and a service area, all to the west;
- Large, landscaped area and play field to the south and east.

Paul Bradshaw continued with a description of the building architecture. The building has continued to gain detail and definition. As the team moves into design development, materials and finishes will be refined. Materials presented today include two shades of brick, neutral gray metal panel, early window selections, and additional details such as muntins / window grids encased with primary colors. The project team concluded their presentation with these finish elements, and discussion followed.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the presentation team and proceeded with questions and comments, focusing comments on specific elements of the landscape and building.

Clarification:

- *Do the fences shown in renders represent what is planned for the project; and for the chain link fence, is there any planting to screen or soften the edge?* Yes, the fences shown are the primary fences and will be included in the [built] project. The fence along the field area is mostly for ball-control due to the site slope. The southernmost fence is along a swale, and there are some maintenance issues with weeds – when thinking about planting that edge it will be critical to make sure that this edge is able to be maintained. The fence along the east edge of the play area is waist-height and decorative metal (not chain link). The team will look at planting options.
- *Is the southern entrance the only ADA or are there several?* There are several entrances that comply with ADA requirements, but the south entrance is the closest to the accessible parking.
- *Where do the visitors park? How do they get in and out of the building?* Spine connects all the way through the building, and the classroom bar can be closed off from the spine. The school has not addressed how the after-hours operations will be handled.

Site & Circulation:

- Study the location of the raised-bed planters in the gardening area; location on north side of the building will pose a challenge for growing crops. Winter vegetables like lettuces are more likely to have success due to both the location of the gardens and months of use (school year from September to May). Consider alternatives including partnering with a local urban farming organization to offer summer planting and learning opportunities.
- Overall, the sequence of lines is more graceful with regard to the updated landscape – the elements relate better to each other visually and functionally. While the site is much improved, there are a few things that need more resolution, such as the brick seating walls. These elements feel like they do not fit and are too angular. Explore opportunities for the site to read more cohesively.
- An awkward condition is created when a fence ends abruptly, without a logical terminus – is there something that can mitigate the sudden ending of this very linear feature at south edge of the play field? Offer some additional solutions for buffering the end of the fence.
- Native vines could help soften fences and make them more integrated with the landscape.
- The nature garden doesn't need to be a raised bed; it can be more organic and looser.
- Bio retention will need to be very well planted; it cannot be code-minimum. This area is the front face of the building. It has the opportunity to be rich with life: plants, bees, butterflies, etc. A code minimum approach will not be robust enough.

- Pay special attention to safe connections off campus and into the neighborhoods, especially with = streets that may be overlooked. An example is the connection from Marx to the west parking lot.
- The landscape has improved and feels more intuitive, like a natural connector. The program around the building is great – the “back door” has been remedied with program disbursed throughout the site in a purposeful way. It appears the team has taken full advantage of the site and the community will benefit from this effort.
- Look at areas of pause and circulation and modulate the width of the paths accordingly. Where do these areas occur? Allow the paths to respond to function and need of users.
- Artwork needs proper weatherization to keep it in good shape. The scale of the work limits the interior installation; it is approximately 40’ long by about 12’ wide and will need to remain outdoors.

Building:

- The building attempted to respond to the comments, but perhaps some of the comments were misunderstood, specifically the comments relating to materiality and playfulness.
 - Playfulness was not meant to suggest busying up the façade;
 - Use of materials can help to articulate masses and to give them identity instead of having the building read as an amorphous brick mass;
 - Avoid breaking up overall building into smaller masses by applying a variety of materials universally – instead use the materials to create volumes with their own identities connected by the linear circulation spine or some other unifying element;
 - Use the different brick tones with more contrast on the different volumes – current application applied to all volumes gives a sameness to the buildings.
 - Repetition of articulation is working against the effort to scale the building to its context;
 - Try using two materials for each façade of the individual volumes to simplify and clarify them – using a diagrammatic approach would be acceptable to start to organize the façade(s) and give rationale to the overall reading;
 - The project has different programmatic elements that warrant the different volumes, materiality can help code the different elements and playfulness can come from the feeling of having a collection of volumes.
- Main spine is working well, but the building is still far too busy – the different headers, materials, colors, muntin, are all competing for attention. Allow the materials to have more hierarchy and spare some of the moves for a different volume, allow others to recede entirely.
- There is an opportunity to refine and clarify the materials.
 - Orange Brick and grey metal panel is extremely generic – as applied, these finishes could go on almost any building (multi-family residential, retail).
 - Think about how the materials can reinforce the identity of this building as a school and community center.

- Metal panel offers an opportunity to create interest and contrast. If it can't be color, it should at least be lighter to create more contrast.
- Rainbow panels are exciting – can some of this color and excitement be applied to the exterior, too? Color can be deployed in a playful way without being too busy or juvenile.
- Brick tones are too close in shade. Use more contrast – select brick finishes with more differentiation (tint or shade) to achieve a more noticeable difference in the articulation.
- Overall, the building massing is very successful; allow the materiality to emphasize it instead of competing with it.
- The busyness of the south façade counteracts the great work of the volumes. Scale and massing are right, but the finish materials are too alike and make this read as one big, horizontal volume.
- Entrances -
 - Proper materials will help to define the entrances;
 - Recreation center entrance is recessed pretty far into the lot and may be difficult to locate. Could the entrance be rotated 90 degrees to face west? This will not increase the building footprint but will give it more presence.
 - Canopy at the primary entrance feels like an afterthought; consider playing off of the glazed spine or the rainbow feature on the interior lobby – something that utilizes the elements. More integrated, less applied.
- Lighting plan will be an important next step due to the many angles and deep recesses.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Paul Bradshaw – Grimm + Parker

Kristen Gedeon, Jason Alexander – MK Consulting

Maurice Gaskins – City Schools

Cyndi Smith, Paul Crampton, Chang Song, Liam Kraus, Kat Schooley, Billy Arias - Attendees

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

Tamara Woods*, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, Carmen Morosan - Planning