

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: March 23, 2023

Meeting #75

Project: Southern Views Apts.

Phase: Design Development

Location: 1515 N. Washington Street, Broadway East Neighborhood

PRESENTATION:

Context / Background:

Bishop Dante Hickman reintroduced the project, which was last reviewed by the Panel in 2018. The project was paused but is now ready to resume and move forward. The site is located within the Broadway East neighborhood on the North Gay Street corridor; this corridor has been undergoing development during the past few years. There are several recently completed projects including the Mary Harvin age-restricted (senior) multi-family housing building and the American Brewery Building, which is a historic adaptive reuse project. There are also new parks and green spaces, and other mixed-use and residential projects in the development pipeline. Some of these projects, including the Mary Harvin senior housing and the Southern Streams Health and Wellness Center, are being developed by Southern Baptist and Bishop Hickman.

Building Design:

The site has quite a bit of elevation change across the site, and the building responds to the elevation by splitting the building into two massings.

Massing

- In response to panel comments, the building massing has been adjusted to strengthen the urban design and reduce the impact of the surface parking lot on N. Washington Street. Adjustments include rotating the parking lot away from N. Washington Street and shifting the building west from the corner of Gay and towards N. Washington Street. An open space is created at the corner of Gay and Federal Streets that allows park views from the surrounding buildings and creates a new urban space.
- The pedestrian sequence entering the building from the parking lot has been improved; a new convenience entry from N. Washington Street has been added.

Façade

- An overview of the material palette and rationale for its application to the building facades was presented in both elevations and three-dimensional views.

Landscape Design

The landscape presentation included a discussion of the fencing that will surround the building along Gay and Federal Streets, as well as the variety of plantings and landscape spaces around the building and along the entry sequence.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the presentation and noted that drawings should be clearly legible as a threshold for presenting the project. Much of the design has remained the same since the last time the Panel saw the project, but minor changes were noted. The Panel moved into clarifying questions before continuing with their comments.

Clarification:

- *In terms of the topography of the site, is the corner of Gay at Federal the high point? Yes, that is correct.*
- *The SWM facilities were referred to as “retention facilities” by the team. Are these micro bio-retention facilities or are they something else? Yes, the facilities are planned to be micro bio-retention types.*
- *What is the width of the tree strip along the street edge (specifically along Gay, Federal and Washington Streets)? The tree pits are 4’ wide by 12’ long; where there is a full grass strip the width is typically 4’ wide.*
- *Are the trash collection locations within the building? Yes, there is a trash room inside the building, and this will be serviced on specific trash pick-up days.*
- *Where is the lowest point of the site; is there a grade change along Washington? There is approximately 2’ – 3’ and there is a depressed area between the sidewalk and building along Gay with a series of stepped walls. The ground level is about equal to the first level apartment floor. A double retaining wall with a swale conveys the water to a storm drain.*
- *Where are the bus stops? There are two at the northern edge of the site at the corner – one for the east / west and one for the north / south.*
- *What is the condition of the corner at the southern end? There is an existing barber shop that has been established in the neighborhood for a long time. A renovation of that building and other tenant spaces is planned as part of this development project. There is a plan for a restaurant tenant at the corner that will utilize some of the outdoor space. Access to the rear of this building (group of spaces) is provided through a paved alley off of N. Washington.*
- *Is there still a park planned for across N. Gay Street? Yes, this will be a “town square” type of space for the Southern Streams Health and Wellness Center, this new project being discussed today, the senior housing, and the commercial just discussed in the previous question on the south edge of the site.*
- *What is the intent of the window color – does the team envision these to be a lighter color or the darker color shown in some of the renders? There are two colors shown, because there have been conversations about changing to a less expensive / non-custom color. The team is looking at a darker color, a medium or dark bronze. They are considering price point, and looking at manufacturers as they discuss the various trade-offs with the client.*

COMMENTS:

Landscape Design:

- Site sections and clear graphics that allow the Panel to read the graphics are necessary. The landscape drawings were illegible and therefore very difficult to understand. In order to have a productive conversation, the team must be ready to present clear graphics.
- There have been verbal suggestions in the presentation that are not backed up by visuals; showing the ideas are essential in order for the Panel to have a good understanding of the design intent.
- The landscape design needs to intentionally manage topography instead of just allowing it to “happen” around the building and site. More thought should be given to multi-purpose interventions that are visually appealing *and* help to mitigate the needs of stormwater management, protection from the elements and grading.
- Clarity of what is happening between the bio-retention and the program of the courtyard isn’t yet clear. It is not understood how these elements interact and work together.
- At the top of the site [corner of Federal and Gay Streets]:
 - This seems very prominent for a play area – as proposed, the play area does not feel safe at such an active intersection. The buffer shown is not sufficient for the space to feel protected.
 - Is there a way to locate the play area within the courtyard, away from the busy intersection? Consider how the play area can be better incorporated into the landscape.
 - Across Gay Street, there is a good-sized passive green space. A building entrance [and path to the sidewalk are] located mid-block on Gay, which indicates a crossing to the park. This needs more study or people will assume they should cross Gay (a busy street) at this location. As designed, there are subtle unintended consequences.
 - Think through a path at the corner of Gay and Federal as an alternative to this mid-block entrance path.
 - There is an opportunity for a gateway moment at the corner, and a meaningful connection to the park across the street. Additional attention can help this piece feel more like a place of respite while also providing a focal point at the corner.
 - Bus stops flanking the site offer the opportunity to celebrate the various transit modes that exist around the site – it is possible to provide a gentle gesture, with a bench or shade element, to acknowledge the various transit modes that serve this project.
- Along the other public edges – Gay, North Washington, and the southern edge:
 - More intention is needed for the design of the open space; specifically at the edges.
 - A series of rocks may not be sufficient to defining that edge – if there are budget restrictions, this seems like a good place to cut costs as the proposed boulders do not provide much of an edge.
 - Let the rocks go before the omitting any trees if there are budget concerns.
 - The alley at the south end of the site seems to only have a small allocation of trees and a fence. There is a better solution for this edge; the design should preempt the future use of the adjacent parcel.
 - Planting very narrow strips of lawn between the sidewalk and street is not recommended – these narrow strips of grass do not last. While it may be cheaper on the front end, the maintenance costs will soon outpace any savings.

- In general, more robust planting areas have much better chance of survival in urban settings. Foot traffic, dogs, ice-melt products, etc. all contribute to the death of landscape, especially when there are not a lot of robust plantings.
- Note that along fences, line trimmers can cause damage. If grass is planted, and line trimmers are not used, weeds will grow up along the fence line. Native planting strips offset from the fences are highly recommended... this approach can discourage foot traffic.
- Additionally, native plantings are easier to maintain and won't require tools that will potentially damage fencing.
- On the interior (Washington Street) parking lot:
 - Parking entrance from North Washington collides with the southernmost parking spaces. Consider the functionality and practical needs of the parking lot as you work to refine the details.
 - The strip of green between the parking lot and the Gay Street wing of the building needs more study.
 - The portion of landscape between the lot and wing of the building that fronts on Federal is more successful.
 - For the Gay Street wing, consider shifting the parking lot or the building to accommodate a more generous buffer. Distance between car and window needs to be more than 6'.
 - This will allow a much better experience for both the units looking out into the lot, and for the view back toward the building from North Washington.
 - Panel understands this might be tight, but the team should do all they can to massage the project and building footprint to accommodate the landscape necessary to ground the building appropriately on all sides.
- The team is urged to study the fence and meaningful pedestrian connections to the site as the landscape moves forward.
- Develop a kit of parts to apply to this site – the parts don't need to be applied generically across the site but select elements appropriate to the specific conditions. Use this logic to organize the site response, based on the context.

Building Design:

- Building has a semi-suburban quality because of the way it is sited.
- There are six different materials selected for the building façade – this contributes to a busy façade that runs the risk of feeling dated in the future.
- Note that the six materials do not even include window finishes, so the building may have up to eight materials. Study ways to edit this down to four materials or so, to give this a more elegant and refined feel, instead of feeling so busy.
- The previous edits have helped unified the base; heavier materials ground the project. There is good logic to the materials and how they are applied, but there are too many elements that are purely decorative – these elements are undermining the thoughtful (more urbane) approach of the façade that could be easily achieved with a little more restraint.
- The Panel has full faith in the quality of the design team's ability to edit and refine the design.

- For the windows – if there is a budgetary need for some lighter (stock) windows, the Panel urges the team to preserve the darker (custom) windows at prominent corners.

Next Steps:

Work with Planning Staff to complete Design Review addressing the comments above. Please note that signage updates were not shared and will need to complete design review but may do so under a separate process.

Attending:

Brandon Schultz, David Gavin, Jean Vieth, Sara Eikrem – Quinn Evans Architects

Craig Richmond – Landscape Architect

Kevin Anderson, Douglas Kennedy, Mark Tsitlik – KCW Engineers

Bishop Dante Hickman – Developer / Southern Baptist

Anthony Osbourne, Sharon Bradley and Pavlina Ilieva* - UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard**, Caitlin Audette, Eric Tiso, Imani Jasper - Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff