

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

Date: August 27, 2020

Meeting #36

Project: Woodbrook Heights

Phase: Schematic

Location: 2565 Pennsylvania Avenue, Baltimore MD 21217

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Project Overview: Woda Cooper Companies is the developer and recently completed a workforce housing development nearby on Pennsylvania Avenue. This project is a 4 -story, 52 Unit Rental Apartment Building (LIHTC) with 27 surface parking spaces - new construction. Total building area is 58,764 SF.

Neighborhood Context: The project is located in Penn North, one block north from North Avenue. The Pennsylvania Ave urban fabric consists of a mix of commercial & residential buildings along with parking lots. The inner residential blocks are a mix of 1990's 2 story rowhouses & 19th century 2 & 3 story rowhouses.

Existing Site Conditions: The site currently consists of several existing structures. A large 1-2 story building (41,000 SF +/-), a former commercial laundry, fronts Pennsylvania Ave, Retreat St & Woodbrook Ave. A parking lot extends across the site fronting along Pennsylvania Avenue. Another commercial building & (2) 3-story rowhouses front on Retreat Street.

Urban Design Goals: To replace dilapidated buildings along Retreat Street, continuing the residential fabric to Pennsylvania Ave. Extend the street wall along Pennsylvania Ave. to create a sense of place.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the project team for the presentation and moved into clarifying questions and comments.

Site:

- Can the additional rowhouses / lots be acquired and incorporated in the proposal to make this a full block development in Phase II?
- Concern about the severity of the wall along Retreat Street due to the use across the street (tires, junk yard, etc.)
- Need to recognize and support the beauty that is in the neighborhood, instead of just defending against the negatives.

- Some portion of the building as mixed use would be more compatible with the context of the neighborhood.
- Access to the site – restrain the vehicular access to Retreat Street
- Surrounding context can change (and likely will); opportunity to bring something new to neighborhood.
- Adding a landscape architect to the team as soon as possible will improve project; L.A. can develop more deliberate set of spatial sequences, relate building and outdoor spaces to the street. This will allow the design to drive site layout rather than parking requirements.
- The spaces between the buildings are opportunity for social cohesion, pleasant experience, etc. Are there partners to help develop long-term programming and galvanize community engagement (arts, gardening, etc)? If so, consider their spatial needs and how those programs will interact with the public realm.
- Create partnerships and programming for the vacant portion of the site to be developed in Phase II – could be temporary use in interim.
- Open space on Pennsylvania Ave. leaves the site feeling very fragmented. Extremely important to reinforce major artery of Penn Ave. More important to improve continuity along Penn. Ave. rather than the smaller (Retreat) street. Opportunity to rotate L shape and orient building along Penn to eliminate gap.
- Team is strongly urged to focus on Pennsylvania Ave. Explore possibility of adding a viable commercial program/structure in the future and siting the proposed building, so it supports the next phase of development.
- Community outreach still needs to happen – there is a call for much more iconic building to support the Black Arts District; however, market drives development which can be inconsistent with neighborhood wishes. Potential for a new infill building (commercial or mixed use) could be situated along Penn Ave. in the future. If this is to happen, development team needs to be mindful and design it now; leaving gaps and hoping they are filled in the future is not a plan.
- Integral planters on street edge are a good move.

Building:

- Public space on the corner is good from urban design point of view but it convolutes the entry. Sliding the awning over the entrance (as currently designed) doesn't necessarily remedy the issue. Entrance needs more study – could be more iconic.
- Brick element of the entry contradicts the intent of the entrance – consider eliminating brick above to maintain the language of the corner.
- Vertical slivers of brick are problematic – simplification can result in more elegant reading (vs. the precarious little gaps).

- Northwest façade – upper panels create the appearance of compressed brick resulting in unbalanced proportion; needs more relief. Could be resolved through different detailing or extending the brick up.
- Base of building – maybe brick along public elevations stay at 3-stories, and the lower brick base (at rear of building) becomes a different color / material to create a more cohesive reading. The transition from three- to one-story brick is abrupt and confused the material articulation between the masonry and siding portions of the façade.
- Not utilizing natural breaks in the building to terminate brick can read as superficial. Consider revising moments of brick termination.
- Opportunity to improve material palette; related languages are ok, but more contrast would be nicer.
- Consider moving community room for better connection to interior of site; opportunity to easily switch the location of community room and offices to make a stronger connection and better use of the outdoor space in the rear.

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing comments above.

Attending:

Peter Fillat, Kevin Roycroft – Fillat + Architects

Andrew Cohen – Woda Cooper Companies

Ed Gunts, Sheena Ham, Billie Malcolm, Annie Hall, Carley Milligan, Donald Wright – Attendees

Mr. Anthony, Ms. O'Neill, Ilieva, Bradley – UDAAP Panel

Howard Tutman – DHCD

Sen. Antio Hayes – MD State Senate

Laurie Feinberg*, Ren Southard, Tamara Woods, Chad Hayes – Planning

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