

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

Date: September 15, 2022

Meeting #67

Project: 26th & Sisson

Phase: Design Development

Location: 401 W. 26th Street, Remington

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Joel Fidler with Ayers Saint Gross introduced the multi-family residential project. Site constraints include CSX rail line to the south/east along with a steep grade down to the rail line, 60' ROW at W. 26th Street, and cell tower on site along Sisson Street. The site is located near industrial buildings and typical Baltimore rowhouses. The proposed building is composed of two masses, one five-stories tall and the other four stories, for an overall max. height of approximately 60' tall. The project seeks to bridge between the residential scale of the existing neighborhood and the future, denser neighborhood.

The team has also explored materiality and building proportions through the lens of the neighborhood. The material selection focuses on the intersection between traditional and modern – the building is intended to read as a transition between old and new; the existing neighborhood consist of rowhouses and warehouses built in the early 1900s, with more recent buildings mixed into the urban fabric. The resulting building façade is organized with vertical and horizontal patterns and break the massing down into shorter sections.

The following comments from the previous presentation were addressed:

- Shield the entrance to help it feel more welcoming and protected from vehicles
- Make a meaningful effort to stitch this project into the neighborhood
- Loft-like units express themselves more visibly as two-story from the exterior
- Misalignment of the awning at the entrance
- Separation between the fitness center and the sidewalk
- Areas around the entries where gathering may occur
- Add street trees on Sisson, and use trees to help screen cell tower
- Articulate brick, materials in general
- Resolve the top of the building

DISCUSSION:

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

- *What has changed the most considering the budget has been reduced?* The materiality, windows, and detailing have been revised. The team looked at the landscape podium area and felt it was overly large for the scale of the space, so that was reduced, as well, to save cost.
- *What has the team done to accommodate the grade change?* The retail level is a step up to reconcile the difference, so that the entrance is level at interior and exterior. The grading of the sidewalk absorbs the change along the exterior. Some of the seating was eliminated to accommodate this shift. The sill of the storefront has also been raised up – mitigating the indoor / outdoor elevation was a huge challenge.
- *Why does the landscape extend into the plaza area at the retail corner?* The landscape buffer allows for the elevation to be reduced quickly toward the building.
- *With the view of the city, why are there no balconies at the rear?* The railroad posed a challenge. This project is affordable housing, so additional limitations from HUD prevented balconies so close to the tracks.

Site:

- Building and site have been advanced in a methodical way. Landscaping around the tree on Sisson Street can be adjusted to accommodate more generous circulation.
- Team is encouraged to think carefully about screening with landscape and / or fence around the cell tower.
- Public / private separation is successful; the Panel wishes there could be more green space, but limitations of the site and necessary density do not always allow for more.
- Café could speak to spaces across the street by remaining open visually. These spaces may not exist now, but with the development in the future, having additional retail across the street is a likelihood.
- Progress on this project since last presentation has helped gel building and site.
- Midblock entry is what it is – difficult for the Panel to address this when it was so baked in from the start.
- Too bad the material at the back is generic where it is most visible from Sisson. The clear view from Sisson makes this an important façade – it will always be highly visible, and some effort should have been made to elevate this side. The team is encouraged to detail this carefully as they move into CDs.

- Disappointment in the services being so close to the sidewalk; the comment from the previous presentation to move services back into the site more should have been studied.
- Surface parking lot near the public realm is not the highest and best use. Panel is optimistic that a better use than the asphalt parking lot will be a future demand, and a change will result.
- Courtyard is intimate and while it might not be a true community space, it does add to the charm of the neighborhood.
- Good differentiation between the neighborhood with setback, ground floor uses, and landscape buffer.

Building:

- The Panel doesn't usually review projects so far along in the Construction Document phase; most projects are better served by coming in the SD or DD phases. The Panel's comments should be used wherever applicable to this project, but also be understood as a learning opportunity for future projects.
- Team is encouraged to use the conversation about façade visibility, materiality, and budgets to learn and apply to future projects in order to avoid significant changes to important elements of the project so late in the design phase.
- Wood panel needs to die into the fiber cement. As designed, it reads awkwardly. This is a subtle detail that needs to be resolved – the brow element needs to be either raised or lowered.
- The project is beginning to read as one project instead of two buildings, but there are many materials coming together at the entry area – it is very busy. Considering this will likely not change, the team is encouraged to detail this area carefully to help the execution so all materials work together.
- The Panel congratulates the team for keeping nicer materials despite the budget constraint and feels the application of warmer palette is a successful move.
- Materiality is complimentary; ribbed metal panel will help to mitigate large façade by providing texture.

Next Steps:

Address the panels comments above and work with Planning staff on next steps.

Attending:

Joel Fidler, Tarek Saleh, Abigail Thomas, Brian Kinninger – Ayers Saint Gross

Maurice Gaskins, Brandon Brooks, Carley Milligan, Lonna Babu, Ed Gunts, Faner Francis –
Attendees

Mr. Anthony, Mses. Illeva and Bradley – UDAAP Panel

Tamara Woods, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette – Planning