

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

Date: May 11, 2023

Meeting #77

Project: Harbor Point, Parcel 1

Phase: Schematic Design I

Location: 1000 Wills Street, Fells Point

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Max Beatty began the presentation with an introduction of the project. Parcel 1 is the final piece of a 20-year master planning process in the Harbor Point Planned Unit Development (PUD) and located at the northwest corner of the site. This is the culmination of a series of development projects. Since its inception, the Harbor Point development focused on creating a dense, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighborhood on a 27 acre formerly industrial site. This piece of the project includes a mix of housing, office, retail, hotel and plaza spaces.

The design team includes Jeff Kenoff and Greg Mell (KPF), Todd Harvey (BHC) and Richard Jones (iO Studio). The KPF team continued the presentation with an introduction of the architecture. The team likes to use the expression of “connecting people to place” and this expression guided the development approach. This approach focuses on connectedness to place, and not just to Baltimore, but more specifically within the city at the harbor’s edge.

The team focused on the following design objectives:

- Memorable public space (history of the site and future of the site)
- Site porosity with public connection between central plaza, promenade, and harbor
- Pedestrian scaled design
- Harbor views – to, from, and through
- Tasteful and timeless massing and facade

The project is inspired by the materiality, grid, and varied cadence of the surrounding area, as well as by the industrial history. The team worked to step the building down to the harbor, rather than creating a drastic vertical at the water’s edge. The landscape takes people to, through and around the building, and navigates the grade at the west edge, which was a challenge for the project given that there is a large drop toward the waterfront.

Richard Jones presented the landscape portion of the project, which was inspired by chromium mining (part of the industrial history of the site) and the harbor. The site is inspired by the regional landscape, which is sparse and serpentine, and the hyper-local landscape of Soldier’s Delight, which is rocky and varied. The project also required the team to explore issues related to access, entry, visibility of the Harbor Promenade. The team is grappling with the different attitudes of the promenade – the existing

promenade is very hard at the edge, but this project will incorporate opportunities to soften the water's edge with a more natural landscape. The landscape design is currently in the schematic phase and the team is eager to hear input from the Panel as they move forward with the design.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their very thorough presentation and noted the expertise of the resident Landscape Architect, Sharon Bradley, is missing from the Panel today. Ms. Bradley has provided comments based on the draft presentation, and those comments will be incorporated into the notes.

The panel continued with clarifications and questions before giving comments.

Clarifications:

- *How many stories are each of the towers?* The tallest tower shown today is 40 stories; the team is working through the program, market demand, etc. before making a final determination of the exact number of stories.
- *Has the team looked at other tower configurations?* Yes, the team studied a multitude of options, and typically, the most efficient towers are designed to mirror each other. The team strove for uniqueness over opting for twin towers. The chosen path is more expensive, but going with three unique towers allowed the towers to be staggered and allow for the best views from each tower. Additionally, having three towers means they are able to read more as a family. Finally, the towers also work well with the program requirements.
- *Is the bulk of the program on the southern tower?* Not necessarily – the buildings are fairly balanced.
- *Was there any thought about not carrying the plaza all the way through?* The design process was informed by options and iterations, but the team really strove to have flexible, open, connected landscape. The team looked early on at closing this off, but opted for something that was more fluid and linear. The team felt that the fluidity would benefit the greater community. It seemed to compliment the grade change, entries, drop off, etc.
- *The retail along the promenade is very compressed into a single story, which puts a lot of pressure on the landscape; is there a way to address the building as it meets the ground?* The team is still looking at balancing the program, how the building, how it meets the ground, how it engages with the landscape and what that balance should be. The team will look at how to integrate the building more.
- *The plan for Point Park was reviewed at a previous UDAAP meeting. Please remind the team whether the series of stairs and ramps was part of the original design.* Yes, the team had always envisioned this piece as part of the park.
- *First and second story of the building are buried and there are a lot of stairs and change of grade. Please explain to the Panel how the grade works; are there any site sections that can be shared?*

Elevation starts at 12' at the northeast corner, then increases to 19' at the Central Avenue, then at the southeast corner it increases again to 28' before returning to 16' at the southeast corner, then back to 12'. Along Central Avenue, the team maintained a grade of 5% and there is a flat area that is being held by a retaining wall at elevation 20' while the street slopes down. This is to give level access to the retail entries. Hotel is off the linear park, the office is daylighting on the interior plaza, office is accessed along that same area.

- *What is the function of the breezeway? Is it intended to give more lighting for the building? Is it projecting into the landscape or is the landscape permeating through?* The team designed this as a covered slip and a point of prospect to view the park. It was meant to act as a portal to frame the relevant historical context. The team views it as a key element for capturing a spectacular view.

Site:

In general:

- Panel complimented the team on their overall approach to the project. Panel feels ideas for Parcel 1 are a fitting culmination of the larger Harbor Point project. The buildings have evolved over the years to reflect the era in which they were conceived and built. The overall project will be an interesting cumulative learning experience for the city.
- There is still room for improvement for the Parcel 1 design. Specifically, there seems to be a disconnect between what is driving the design, and a lack of clarity about whether decisions were made based on purely formal ideas or as a response to the program and landscape.
- Design is not a linear process – an idea may be the inspiration for a design decision, but it may shift in response to constraints. Interpretation and change can dilute the clarity of the original idea(s). There are significant moments in the current design that appear to have this non-linear process, and now is the appropriate time to step back and reflect whether the design choices are delivering on the original goals and design intent.
- The Panel's comments are intended to help the team reflect on whether the current proposal meets the goals they initially set for the project. Comments will be grouped by:
 - Design decisions – now is the time to evaluate the big moves and key ideas before getting too far into the details;
 - Porosity – the entire project (all of Harbor Point) has been very committed to porosity from its inception and this piece is key to the overall porosity;
 - Promenade – ground plane needs to be evaluated on whether connectivity is actually functioning as it was meant to function.
- A main challenge lies in how the design is evaluated against the principles and goals the team set for the project. For instance, how do you connect people to place? What is the perspective of the designer, and how is the built environment perceived by the people who the space is intended to serve?
- Set up a system of evaluating decisions based on relationships between buildings [to other buildings] and landscape, and through an understanding of how the design evolved. It would be helpful to understand what the team learned from earlier iterations, and how those early choices impacted what is being shown now.

- Team is requested to share the various options that were explored – there is no need to see every option, but the including the top contenders in future presentations would be very informative and help to guide the Panel’s comments.
- Incorporate site sections in the next presentation to the Panel. These site sections should also inform the design as it develops.

Hierarchy and big design moves:

- The relationship of the central park and the east-west plaza between the new buildings sets up a strong axial connection with the harbor, which is an enormous design opportunity; however, the connection simply dies into the riprap. The descent to the promenade could be less pronounced to give more of a moment to the landscape as it reaches the lower grade at the harbor.
- As designed, this same landscape element [continuation of the central park into the east-west plaza] outperforms the building(s). There is so much happening with regard to the grade change and the views.
- Point Park is supposed to be the crowning moment for the landscape – it is such a prominent location. Consider downplaying the cascading plaza; perhaps it ends at the higher elevation, and there is a more discrete way to navigate down than the proposed ramp and possibly connecting back to the main park ramp via the breezeway.
- A method of vetting the landscape hierarchy seems to be missing. The design isn’t necessarily wrong, but the analysis is incomplete. Now that the team has the bigger picture assembled, develop a way to make decisions that can help clarify and prioritize the most important landscape moments.
- The team has been looking at the site from an aerial perspective (birds eye view) for a long time, but it is important to understand how people are getting to the site and what elements are drawing them in at the ground level.
- There are different groups who will come to the site – people who live here, people who live nearby, people who work here, and people who are simply coming to enjoy or visit. Many people will be approaching from the same point (from the north or east), and the team must explore approach sequences to inform the design.
- The retail and Point Park are key to how people will move through the site. These elements are both major draws, and people will flow to these points.
- A lot of effort is required to get from the upper to the lower retail, and the ramp and the east-west plaza feels a bit like it is trying to steal the show from Point Park.
- Revisit the axial relationship of the existing central park and the new east-west plaza. The central park was intended to give some relief to the density and create an experiential viewshed into the Harbor. The central park works *with* Point Park, not against it – the central park is positioned to be an object, a central gathering space surrounded by the buildings, and Point Park is an open vista to the Harbor. The central park is more downplayed and does not compete with the impressive landscape planned for Point Park.
- As shown the east-west plaza space is starting to compete with the other landscape elements – consider taking some of the architectural language from existing parks at Harbor Point that are designed / in construction.
- As good as it looks, the view to the harbor [from the east-west plaza] only works from a single vantage point. It is a very different experience from below because of the work required to navigate the topography; consider what value it (the ramp / stair element) adds to the project.

- Because of the focus on the east-west piece, the grade change is objectified. It reinforces the disconnect between the two levels, especially considering the materiality is also different (at the lower level).

Porosity:

- Panel reminds the team that visual porosity can be a very effective tool; team should explore the various physical connections and evaluate the importance of each. There is an opportunity to create more hierarchy of the physical connections and reduce competition.
- The portal is a beautiful idea, but the diagrammatic intent can be realized without a physical connection. The porosity can be visual, which allows the priority to be put back into the main axis of the project and create a true hierarchy.
- Porosity is expressed in various ways around the site. The T. Rowe Price building has a different feel of porosity even from the earlier buildings, which shows how the approach has evolved. The Parcel 1 site is an opportunity to further study what porosity means in the Harbor Point context.
- If intent is to capitalize on the views to the west, the Panel wonders whether the building could be a bit narrower and could rotate to open up the view.
- There is an opportunity to use the juxtaposition of the south building and the park – compressing Point Park a little to open up the view would create a sense of interest and curiosity.
- Setting up a difference between visual and physical porosity will naturally put some hierarchy back into the circulation of the site, which can help the team organize other elements, such as gateways and entry sequences.
- One important relationship that does not appear to have been addressed is the relationship between Point Park and the existing (built) central park. Study the relationship between these spaces, and how people move between them. Consider the role of the new buildings with regard to this connection.

Promenade:

- The upper level and lower level are very disconnected, and the material articulation makes the disconnect feel even more prominent by reinforcing how isolated the lower portion (at the northwest corner) feels.
- Promenade cannot be a peripheral experience; it must be a central design feature.
- Team is encouraged to integrate the promenade more with the base of the building. Materiality could be pulled up or pushed out – the opportunity to meaningfully integrate these elements must be studied.
- Address the materiality to give some relief to how compressed the retail element along the promenade feels – this could extend up to 2-3 levels in order to tie the promenade to the retail spaces above not just in landscape but also in the building architecture or even to 6-7 stories to give some relief to the façade.
- Promenade and retail need to be more aligned; in other locations around the harbor everything is on the same level which allows the spaces to enliven each other with their various program elements.
- Promenade needs to feel like part of this project rather than something that encircles it.

- Use the promenade to tie the pieces together and consider how people will experience the site in its entirety. The promenade is an opportunity to celebrate the site and should not be treated as an afterthought.

Building:

- The tower on the promenade side feels very tall – it seems to come all the way down to the ground. There could be more bulk in the south tower to pull the height down a little.
- Team is encouraged to look at massing it differently; if the team has already explored other options for this tower, please share them in the next presentation.
- Panel appreciates the very distinct podium and slender tower, but there is a proportion at the ground floor retail that needs more exploration. The towers are so tall, and if they are not mitigated more through the massing, they will feel very imposing.
- Walk around the inner harbor. There are other towers nearby, but this tower is much closer to the waterfront than others. Because of the location at the waterfront, the base needs more study – a human scale must be maintained.
- The team noted they strove to give the buildings a varied scale; this idea is executed well on the overall massing, but it is less successful closer up, at the ground floor. The first level feels very squat, and the ramp reinforces that perception from the water (looking east) – some of the renderings are very telling in how that façade will be perceived.
- Having a single story that continues for hundreds of feet can feel unrelenting; study the entrances, the articulation of the retail spaces, integration with the landscape and promenade.
- Program development will help the landscape architecture feel less stratified and address some of the challenges of the base. Look carefully at ground level, question porosity and identify opportunities erode the base more.
- North and west sides feel as though they are an afterthought. These need more work and need to be studied from the perspective of the users as they serve as gateways to the rest of the area.
- Study the relationships and program opportunities in section, and consider using program to help the building navigate the grade more (rather than relying so heavily on the landscape).

Additional site comments provided by Ms. Sharon Bradley, Panelist not in attendance, prior to the scheduled UDAAP review:

- I agree with the importance of the concept of Urban Porosity – strong visual and functional connections will be critical to make these spaces lively, activated spaces. There is a risk of a sense of isolation on the "peninsula" there, walled off from the rest of the city by tall buildings.
- That concept looks successfully executed in this particular area- does that porosity and connectivity continue eastward and northward through the other phases? Connections appear to be primarily along the water's edge.
- Somewhat concerned about the horizontal/vertical ratio at the towers. The building scale is massive in relation to the space between (Parcel One Plaza).
- The articulation of the Parcel One spaces are deftly handled, which mitigates the situation. Elements that create human-scale spaces are important- consistent tree canopy, differentiation of the ground plane, etc.

- Interesting treatment of the change in grade: sculptural and elegant. The transition area might benefit from some simplification, however.

Next Steps:

Work with Planning staff to address comments above before returning to UDAAP.

Attending:

Jeff Kenoff and Greg Mell – KPF (Design Architect)
Todd Harvey, Peter Duke – BHC (Architect of Record)
Richard Jones – iO Studio (Landscape)
Max Beatty, Jonathan Flesher – Beatty Development

Melody Simmons – BBJ
Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Pavline Ilieva* and Osborne Anthony – UDAAP Panel
Ren Southard**, Caitlin Audette, Matt Desantis, Chris Ryer – Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff