

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

Date: September 24, 2020

Meeting #37

Project: Highlandtown Elementary Middle School
Schematic

Phase:

Location: 231 S. Eaton Street, Highlandtown

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

John Srygley of JRS Architects began the presentation by reviewing the comments from previous UDAAP in July and explaining how the team addressed the comments. In addition, the team has added a landscape architect, Claire Fishman, to the team.

Updates to the design include:

- Repositioning of the ramp to open up the courtyard playground
- Increased visual transparency from play area to building interior
- Development of a fun, more joyful play area, and incorporate shade trees
- Improved path hierarchy
- Programming and hardscaping of newly captured green space has been studied and reorganized appropriately
- Materiality of building has been updated
- Historical Building and west façade have updated with more balance and symmetry
- New East Façade reflects the existing rhythm and hierarchy
- Service drives are softened with plantings and pervious paving

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation and proceeded with clarifying questions and comments.

Clarifications:

- *Planting Plan* - two specimen trees in the front of the building flanking front entrance will be preserved; proposed paving is further out toward the edge of the site to accommodate these trees. Reddish trees in plan are proposed ornamental trees to provide variation and color. Most of the trees in ROW are existing elm, maple and zelkova; trees on Claremont St. will be replaced as needed. Forecourts will be planted with shrubs and taller ornamental grasses.
- *Proposed fences* - Ornamental fence along the edge of the play court with panic hardware; chain link fence at the retaining wall will remain and segments will be replaced as necessary. Chain link fence at front will be removed.

Site:

- Trees at front must be preserved - important part of the visual narrative. Tree preservation during construction is key; remove failing plants and consider allowing it to just be ground rather than replanting, which may harm the tree.
- Internal courtyard with rubberized surface is current play area should be addressed if possible, but Panel understands that budget may not allow for improvements
- Ramp realignment is successful.
- Traffic garden could be incorporated at little or no cost in play area.
- Planted screening around service dumpster needs to be properly (robustly) planted in order to achieve the desired coverage
- Eastern edge might be a better place for the vegetable gardens - better sun angles and away from the street improving the safety and reducing exhaust fumes affecting edible plants.
- Consider plants - roses have thorns, which may not be appropriate for this program.
- Water retention area should be planted with rich diversity of native plant elements; can improve ecosystem AND become learning experience
- Forecourt contributes to the school as designed; consider moving the north-south path in front of the school closer to the building and away from the street to promote safety and give historic trees more room. Consider removing added elements.
- Northeastern edge with retaining wall - visual effects need to be addressed
- Consider using plantings to define edges at forecourt rather than fences and grass; opportunity to add elements to create interest and wonder and add more joy to the front court.

Building:

- Dialog between conceptual principles and conventions - challenge between existing building and new structure reflecting that building in a respectful way. Beauty in detailing and proportion of the 1920s building. Additions have a pavilion approach to avoid disrupting the existing building. 2007 addition is “safe” and technically correct; pragmatic approach. New addition is starting to break away from the safe approach but could go further.
- Glazing still appears fragmented; could achieve more horizontal reading with more continuous glazing (removing the light-colored panels); screening elements appear as “add-ons” because they do not serve a purpose and are not integrated - consider to the perceived fragmentation of the façade. Shades on south side make sense, but not needed on other sides.
- Belt course could be strengthened by seeking a stronger proportional alignment with the existing structure.
- Contrast of the existing building (solid mass) and new planar elements of the addition using the same material - more common to see this expressed in metal panels instead of brick. Opportunity for more contrast and add boldness.
- Long façade on south broken by entrance is successful because it is meaningful, but the breaks at corners are not. Internal logic expressed on the façade will help to organize
- Brick is used as massing on existing; introducing it as a wall element - if using the same brick, need to stick to the existing rules. Use of brick is conflicting - opportunity to introduce a new material with the new architectural language of the massing
- Overall massing and transparency are successful
- 21st Century initiative is about integrating - interior and exterior, learning and social spaces, school and community, etc. Relationship between building and landscape is lacking - opportunity to look at this as a complete and cohesive environment where interior and exterior reinforce each other.
- Visual porosity is not limited to windows in hallways - should opportunity to create views into the playground by eroding the hallway spaces to allow for gathering spots or breakout learning spaces.

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing comments above.

Attending:

John Srygley, Alex Elmore, Claire Fishman - JRS Architects
Renee Stainrod, Michael McBride, Alici Thomas - BCS
Tim Cober - MSA

Mr. Anthony, Mses., Ilieva, Bradley - UDAAP Panel

Dorothy Hellman, I. McNiell

Laurie Feinberg*, Ren Southard, Tamara Woods, Matthew DeSantis, Martin French, MC
Beuttner, Chris Ryer - Planning