

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

Date: 10 March, 2022

Meeting #59

Project: JHU Student Center

Phase: Design Development

Location: Charles Street at 33rd Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Lee Coyle of Johns Hopkins University gave a brief reintroduction of the project. Liz McDonald with Bjark Ingels Group continued by presenting the building architecture; Alexia Fried with Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates presented the landscape design.

While the site is located at the edge of campus, the team see this project as being the center of student life. The building is situated between Johns Hopkins Homewood campus and the neighborhood to the east, which is full of energy created by 3500 students coming and going between off-campus housing and the businesses on North Charles and Saint Paul Streets. The updated design strives to create a series of distinguishing moments for students to pause both within the building and the landscape. The moments of interior and exterior connections are born out of the difficult site topography. The grade change is a difference of several stories over the course of the site; moving from north to south there is a significant drop. There is access through the building on the second level, which is entered at approximately 33rd Street; the south entrance is at the lowest grade, and the north entrance is at the highest grade.

Site materials have been selected to match vernacular of the larger campus but are applied to this project in a more modern way. The team has also articulated the plaza spaces with strong programmatic relationships to the accommodating interior spaces.

The team distilled comments from the Panel into four main points:

- Clarification of circulation both through and around the building;
- Clarify program as it relates to the landscape;
- Prioritize, develop and describe the relationship between interior and exterior;
- Consider how the building responds to its context: urban fabric, topographic changes, difference in landscape types, and the greater Homewood Campus.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation and continued with clarifying questions and comments. It was noted that the design has not changed significantly, which limits the ability of the Panel to comment further, since many items have not been addressed at this point.

Integration of Site and Building:

- The team has referred to this project as a “gateway” but the image is lacking; a gateway is something that welcomes – it signals a passing through. As designed, the building reads as an object.
- At the outset the building seemed a little foreign, but to the design team’s credit, the scale has been adjusted a little per the Panel’s earlier comments. Even with this adjustment to scale, the building is not yet resolved on the site.
 - The transitions between glazed elements and the landscape need to be stronger, more connected.
 - The entries were born out of the difficult topography and site conditions, and the past comments focused on those constraints. Each entry should articulate itself as it relates to the 360-degree nature of the landscape; yet as designed the entries are very generic glass boxes with double doors – a missed design opportunity to create an experience unique to this building on this site.
 - Site feels additive to the building – there is an opportunity to extend the mosaic pattern of the building. This language could be transferred to the site, by extending the pieces into the landscape. Instead, the landscape and building feel very separate and disconnected.
 - The landscape and the architecture need to coalesce; allow the landscape to take shape in a recognizable way and relate to the building. Take the opportunity to stitch the building into the landscape more.
- The architecture reads as counter intuitive and heavy handed, it is getting in the way of the organic relationships that should occur on this site.
 - The team has not clearly addressed how the building integrates itself with the ground; this challenge does not seem to have been given the appropriate level of attention. The topography has been addressed in a functional way, but the building itself doesn’t take advantage of the layers in the site.
 - When a building is not truly integrated into its context, it runs the risk of feeling dated. While the project is new and exciting now, there needs to be consideration of how it will look and operate in the years to come.

- Focus on the strongest points of the building, the richness of the landscape, and use these elements to create hierarchy and clarity. As designed, the building is separate / removed from the landscape.
- The Panel hopes there is further exploration with the Hopkins team with regard to the design. This will be the last presentation to UDAAP, and design response will be handled with Planning staff.

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing the comments with Department of Planning staff.

Attending:

Lee Coyle – Johns Hopkins University

Liz McDonald – BIG Architects

Alexia Freind - Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc.

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Jessica Iannetta, Lisa Egan, Hana Georg, Matthew Gifford, Tyler Harriott, Rob Klinedinst –
Attendees

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

Tamara Woods*, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette – Planning