

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

Date: March 10, 2022

Meeting #59

Project: Old Town Redevelopment

Phase: Phase I, DD

Location: 500 N. Gay Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Dana Henson introduced the project and team which is comprised of Mission First Housing Development and The Tran Group. Donald Kan of STV continued the presentation with a very brief overview and explanations of how the design has evolved over the course of the project. Vipul Talwar of Waldon Studio proceeded with a closer look at the building design, which has progressed significantly. Since the project's last presentation, the team has been working on developing the building façades with more detail. Kristen Gedeon delivered the landscape presentation.

The design has progressed by addressing the following:

- Definition of the public edge;
- Development of the courtyard, which includes a passive gathering space, concrete planters, and a tree;
- More detailed planting plans, including native species and surface materials;
- Entrance of the residential building, which has been recessed and a canopy added;

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the project team for their presentation. Panelists offered clarifying questions and comments together.

Clarification

- *What is the purpose of the fence at Orleans Street?* The fence is proposed to define the public and private areas. This is the rear of the existing building, and the fence creates privacy and also defines the edge of the public realm.

- *The incubator building seems to have glazing preserved at ground level, but the mezzanine level is not registered on the front of the building; in the former proposal the glazing was higher (to align with the mezzanine). What has changed with this new proposal?* The mezzanine is set back from the front façade with windows at the rear, and the team did not know the exact location of the mezzanine before entering the building. The new design of the façade is more complimentary to the existing structure and the fabric of the block.

In General

- Changes to the building are drastic. The project has evolved through a series of positive improvements; the original proposal struggled with the backs of the buildings along Orleans Street and responded with the introduction of a courtyard building. This approach is appropriate but needs more refinement.
- Team is reminded that project development can be overdone – the presented draft introduces a lot of new ideas (instead of refining earlier ones), but the execution is not yet working to the project’s advantage.
- Change of material, introduction of balconies, different treatment of corner are each appreciated on their own, but how the ideas come together is problematic. As presented the ideas appear to be random. There needs to be a systematic approach to the execution of the façade, site, etc.
- Take one more sweep through the project and apply rules to organize the façade and avoid singular, unjustified moves.

Site and Landscape

- Consider recessing planters instead of cantilevering them – this cantilevered feature can make a pinch point and seems unnecessary at the location shown.
- The courtyard shape and proportions are much improved. The sequence into the space is more inviting.
- Be careful to align the tree:
 - Either align axially or move it completely off center – allow the hierarchy of the tree to set up entry sequence and secondary elements.
 - The serpentine bench should respond to the placement of the tree; decide on the tree location first, then develop the response of the bench and planter.
- Be mindful of invasive evergreens.
- The rhythm of the landscape on Orleans Street needs to pick up on existing context elements to ensure the landscape does not feel additive.
- Check sidewalk dimensions on Orleans.
- Subtle wayfinding and orientation – use distinguishing features to help people orient themselves around the site and within the pedestrian mall space.
- Be sure to not “overstuff” the courtyard with fixed elements:

- Consider movable, lighter furniture that is more flexible.
 - Preservation of the spacious feel will be important to making this space usable.
- Try to implement ideas based on what is there – borrow a little space along Orleans Street to make the strong ideas work. For instance, if there is a desire for Juliette balconies, allow the landscape to shrink in response.
- Formalize the approach; there should be a strong attitude to what kind of urbanity this project makes. Set rules and apply them to the public-facing portion of the project. There should be a readable approach: an if / then condition.
- Consider how the building sits within the site, what types of challenges exist. Use this information to create a set of responses. These responses might adapt, but there should be a hierarchy to the response to inform which rules are fixed and which rules can change. For instance, the public sidewalk becomes a regulating line with a set width; landscape elements respond to this set width by absorbing irregularities and reinforcing the path on the public side with trees, and the private side with a fence or grass, etc.

Buildings

- Orleans Street Building:
 - The changes on the Orleans Street façade are executed in a traditional manner, but the material is modern. The detailing is starting to work, but there needs to be more clarity, design rationale, organization for this to work.
 - Use of terra cotta is appreciated, despite the fact that it is different from the traditional brick and not often seen in Baltimore.
 - Corner façade seems to break down at the courtyard side – this portion of the building needs more study.
 - Treating the corner as a special is appropriate but needs more refinement.
 - Elements need to be applied cohesively – the plan needs to respond to the façade. Let the elements help to define the proportions.
 - Try to implement ideas based on what is behind the façade; borrow space from the landscape as necessary to make the strong ideas work.
 - Recessed piece along Orleans Street that connects the old building and the new – this moment is more successful, but there is a discrepancy where it occurs
 - Oldtown façade (entry to the residential multi-family) needs to be addressed; the entrance can be recessed but the façade above should be flush with the existing buildings. Additionally, there needs to be a cornice element at the top to integrate the façade with its surrounding.
- Incubator Building:
 - The approach of the incubator building is reasonable, but if there is opportunity to provide skylights, it would be recommended to include that as a feature. The space will be much more animated if there is ample daylight introduced.

- Incubator building – the interior layout poses a challenge. The roll-up doors need to relate directly to what is happening on the inside.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Dana Henson – Henson Development

Kristen Gedeon, Sharon Huber-Plano – STV Architects

Donald Kann, Vipul Talwar – Waldon Studio Architects

Precious Washington, Arlisa Anderson, Brandon Brooks, Catherine Benton Jones, Jess Iannetta, Cynthia Newman- Lynch, Andrew Beyea – Attendees

Mr. Anthony, Mses. O’Neill, Ilieva, Bradley – UDAAP Panel

Lembit Jogi, Kevin Gallaher, Jaye Matthews – HABC

Tamara Woods, Caitlin Audette, Ren Southard – Planning