

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

Date: August 27, 2020

Meeting #36

Project: Old Town Redevelopment

Phase: Master Plan

Location: 500 N. Gay Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Dana Henson introduced the project and team, adding emphasis that the Old Town redevelopment is of great importance to her team. The team has reviewed the Panel's previous comments in detail and feel that this updated proposal responds to those comments. Donald Kann of STV Architects continued the presentation with a brief refresher of the project context and history. Several features of the site have changed, including location of hotel and housing, size and massing of buildings, and the inclusion of a central plaza space at the intersection of Forrest and the pedestrian portion of the mall.

Main considerations for site design:

- Existing utilities and historic structures.
- Circulation, especially pedestrian and new street configuration of Forrest.
- Hotel with open ground level for flow through the site and area for gathering.
- Activation of the street.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the project team for their presentation and praised the team for re-examining the plan to align with the overall project goals. Panelists combined their questions and comments, focusing on the master plan aspects rather than details of each building.

Site - Overall:

- There are a lot of different messages in the landscape design – a lot going on. Creating a series of typologies will help to clarify and allow the project to feel cohesive. Sense of repetition is not negative – can be adjusted just as with a color palette to respond to the intricacies. Tweak or adjust from the central set of messages / materials to create moments of interest and emphasize special spaces, while allowing the overall feel to be consistent.

- A more straight-forward plan provides a great idea on which to build on and advance. How do you further refine and enhance the clear simple structure of the plan and build on it?
- Use this initial plan as a massing diagram but remain flexible about the plaza – allow the plaza to evolve and morph along with the buildings, rather than being a rigid, fixed item that dominates the plan and dictates the form of the future buildings. Focus on creating great spaces between buildings and landscape.
- Tree wells should be 6' minimum to support tree canopy... carve out more soil volumes for the trees and green spaces.
- Transition to adjacent residential complex makes a lot of sense, as does the new location of the hotel. Nice job re-thinking these buildings and their locations.
- Hotel needs to be a signature building; tower not integrated into the merchandise building is ok; think about modifying the leg of the hotel on the Forrest Street side.
- Landscape design needs to take a step back – not so concerned about the finishes, but think about use / function / feel in a more diagrammatic manner
- Taller buildings can give the development a presence on the outer edges but need to preserve intimate feeling on interior of the mall (preservation of privacy is an added bonus). Important that this also feels like it's "home" to the residents. Setting the residential back on the upper levels is successful.
- More study between massing and landscape in section – it may feel like there is too much space but it doesn't necessarily need to be "shrunk down" too much to work; layering can help.
- Next iteration of precedents needs to be more specific; rather than "this looks cool" it should be more focused on "this is the same size" or "this is a similar use" etc.
- Look outside of U.S. for pedestrian mall examples – probably more failed examples than successful ones in the U.S. Suburban examples are not applicable here.
- How buildings shape the space should not be in a generic way, develop various types as appropriate for each use and spatial condition.
- Site furnishings and paving – clarify and simplify. The landscape should be the thing that holds the space together and the other elements should be added afterward and should be secondary / passive to the primary elements. Narrow down into more specific understanding of whether this space is paved edge to edge or partially planted.

Site - Plaza:

- Central Plaza – seems like a logical place, but needs more study to refine the size, shape, and fragmented corners. Look at how the buildings make the space without the plaza; doesn't necessarily need to be square.
- Revisit the (historical) market to get clues about what that space wants to be. Could be linear and overlay with the intersection of the mall – explore this idea.

- The loggia on northern Forrest Street buildings is not a great idea... wants to be more compressed and then enter into a bigger open space – sense of arrival.
- Central plaza feels like a European Piazza – needs a clear hierarchy, visual clarity and simplicity to be a successful space. Avoid temptation to clutter it up; focus on simplifying.
- There are two main challenges in organizing the plaza successfully: the axes and the orientation of Forrest St. which captures the footprint of the historic market. Hierarchy is diluted because the streets are similar in size.
- Misalignment of Forest Street is an *opportunity to center on important buildings!* A well-placed building can help hold the space together. The four sides of the square do not need to be the same. It will help to think of the square as two linear spaces that are sliding together and intersecting – develop the spaces for each and introduce a unifying element with the rest of the mall.
- Consider the questions: What is the intent of the Plaza? Is it passive gathering space? For pedestrians or vehicles? Symbolic? Central element? Maybe more important to focus on pedestrian circulation. Old Town Mall is the destination... plaza doesn't necessarily need to be the sole destination.
- View into piazza from Orleans Street is incredible opportunity. Start designing hotel from the ground level view (perspective) – what do these spaces look like?

Site - Circulation:

- Garage pedestrian path to mall sequence is incredibly important. This needs more study, but the initial diagrams are helpful. Use a similar method to look at the garage-to-mall pedestrian sequence.
- Separating the pedestrians on east side of the site seems to work, but the west side needs a bit more study. Think about connecting McElderry Street in a more meaningful way.
- Hotel parking entrance could be misleading for folks dropping off or arriving via automobile – could get messy. This area needs a little more study to ensure clear reading. Resolve conflicting program of hotel drop-off and public garage.
- Bike lanes on either side of the street (Orleans?)
- Intersection of Ensor and Orleans is going to be wildly successful as a point of arrival, use of the existing tower as a key feature.
- Not allowing vehicular traffic through the mall is very important, but now we need to imagine the various scenarios to help shape the space. Clear and deliberate response to how people are using the space will drive successful design.
- Important arrival sequence / access to the garage and drop off – could drop off be moved to East Street to better serve both buildings?

- East Street at Orleans is very visible. Potentially think about moving garage access to East to alleviate hotel entry and mall drop-off and think about rear of building on Forrest now that the street is more secondary.
- Reconsider the need for garage entry on Forrest. If this is residential garage only, Mott street garage entry would be sufficient and more appropriate.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Dan Henson, Dana Henson – Henson Development

Addison Palmer, Kristen Gedeon, Donald Kann, Vipul Talwar – STV Architects

Sharon Huber-Plano, 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

Laurie Feinberg*, Ren Southard, Tamara Woods, Marshella Wallace, Matt DeSantis – Planning

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