

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

Date: April 30, 2020

Meeting #33

Project: Somerset S-4

Phase: Schematic

Location: 31 Jefferson Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Dana Hensen introduced the project and gave a brief overview of the master plan and three buildings within the project footprint that have been through the UDAAP process. This building, S-4, is a key building for the project. It will act as a gateway at the Central / Orleans intersection. Building program is 25,000 SF grocery with multi-family above.

Ryan Geiger of BCT Architects continued the presentation by discussing neighborhood context, transit stop locations and nearby anchors (Enoch Pratt Free Library, Johns Hopkins Hospital). The building is a twinning deal (9% and 4% LIHTC). Although the building is separated with fire walls, and has two separate entrances, all amenities will be shared. Building will be 8 stories with grocery at ground level, parking and multi-family units above. Team considered parking below grade, but found it was cost-prohibitive.

Project Priorities:

- Create a dense walkable neighborhood
- Activate park space with commercial at ground floor
- Knit urban fabric back together and improve experience along Orleans Street
- Tie into Somerset Master Plan
- Create a functional site plan that meets the programmatic needs of grocery tenant

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the project team for their presentations and asked clarifying questions. It was also noted that the building is appropriately scaled at 8-story along a major corridor. The panel's comments will address the building as an opportunity for proud iconic structure that will be an exciting feature of the neighborhood.

Site:

- The building is exciting – acts as a beacon announcing this new development. Initial major site moves seem to work well. Entrances are in appropriate places.
- Unlikely that grocery will have glazing on three sides so keeping retail at the park side is important. Smaller retail on the park side will benefit the building and the neighborhood – hopefully this space will not be absorbed into the grocery footprint. If this entrance is removed, it will result in building turning its back on the park.
- Team needs to accommodate pedestrian traffic from the north and re-think curb cuts.
- Paving elements and site materials help to orient people in the site – additional planting around busy streets is important.
- Courtyard proportion is very good – this will make it a pleasant place to gather.
- Concerns about the service area – if the team doesn't want this area to feel like an alley, upgraded materials will be needed.
- Scale of the building and street may not lend itself to the experience of the string lights as shown in precedent – if this is a goal for the project, layers should be built in at an early stage of the project, not as an afterthought. Even though park is a later phase, plan for this element now.
- Team should revisit the Panel's comments on the park before that piece comes back for review. S-4 building and park should be considered together. Now is an appropriate time to revisit the park to address the relationship between the two.

Building:

- Two residential buildings, grocery anchor, smaller retail – this can benefit building design and be an opportunity. Should not be masked – define 3 or 4 volumes on the site and express the different programmatic elements. Smaller volumes aggregated together and used to play up the strong elements (program, how the building is sited, etc.).
- High density building is welcomed – this is an opportunity for a bold move. Introducing new materials and modern elements may be appropriate for this project.
- Next iteration should be bolder and more optimistic.
- Each façade is different, but there needs to be a common thread weaving the building together. More graceful transitions between the different elements.
- Banding of the brick is out of scale – could be more delicate.
- Residential entrance needs to be resolved, as do the brick bays above.
- Bookending the building can create honorific statement on Orleans Street. Exploit the volume of the building but in a simplified manner.
- Façade does not need to be so broken up on Orleans Street; façade facing the park should resemble the Orleans Street side to establish a very powerful front to the park. Continuity of surfaces is important to stabilize the open space.

- Transition at the top of the park-side façade is a little fussy – needs to be clarified and become more deliberate. That will create a language for that volume and act as a transition between the two languages.
- Side elevations can be quieter – simpler and more elegant through scale of windows, all without different materials.
- Secondary entrance should be secondary – its ok if the second entrance not a big move.
- Volumes at the corners along the north-south edges are successful – opportunity to establish a hierarchy if the building utilizes a different language / different material (complimentary tone, for example) on the infilled façades between the bookends.
- Layered effect can be accomplished with simply changing the tone to offset some of the verticality.
- Fine line between contrast and having the building feel overworked.
- Analyze the project within the context of the neighborhood to ensure it is responding to the neighboring buildings.
- Signage is an opportunity for branding and should be considered as an architectural element.

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing comments above.

Attending:

Ryan Geiger, Sarah Constant – BCT Architects

Dan Hensen, Dana Hensen – Hensen Development

Scot Foster, Steve Stern, Ryan Rumbaoa, Anthony J Cortea Jr., Kristen Gedeon, Michael Dobkin, David Petr, Christopher Everett, Malik Jordan – Attendees

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

Stacy Freed – DHCD

Lembit Jogi – HABC

Laurie Feinberg*, Ren Southard, Tamara Woods, Matthew DeSantis, Eric Tiso – Planning