

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

**Date:** July 23, 2020

**Meeting #35**

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**Project:** Somerset S-2 Buildings B and H

**Phase:** Schematic

**Location:** S. Caroline Street between E. Pratt and Bank Streets

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Sasha Angus from the development team began the presentation by introducing the team and giving a status update on the project, including an overview of recent meetings with community members and HCD. The project will replace 629 public housing units with 1,320 a combination of affordable and mixed income residential units when complete. A school and community center will also be replaced. Blocks B and H (in today's review) will have a mix of multi-family and townhouse type units.

Keval Thakkar of HCM Architects continued the presentation by discussing the panels previous comments and explained how the team addressed the comments.

Project Changes:

- Block B features revised parking area, materials and stoops.
- Block H features more greening and softening to make a friendlier pedestrian street, stepping back of the larger building and revision to the canted building.

**DISCUSSION:**

The Panel began with questions and discussion from the last UDAAP review of the project. Several comments were not addressed; the Panel noted the importance of addressing each comment systematically and in a straightforward manner for reasons of transparency and accountability. Because this is a Choice Neighborhoods project with public funding, process is key to successful execution.

**Clarification:**

- *What is impacting the building setback along Caroline Street?* Setback is used for landscaping and stormwater management.

**Site:**

- Moving some of the parking underground will help manage program, currently it is infringing on the town houses, green space, etc.
- Dead-end created by the fenced area between houses on Block B and at southernmost point between buildings on Block H is problematic – this creates a space with limited visibility that can collect trash or invite illicit behavior.
- Choice Developments try to knit the new into the old and integrate the communities into the surrounding urban fabric – the sameness of the buildings in the new development has a similar problem to old Perkins Homes. Feels too different from the surrounding community, creates doughnut shaped sites with perimeter housing and large paved open areas in center that do not have clear ownership or invite private/communal use.
- Façades are all derived from same kit of parts – makes it distinct from surrounding and islands it from surrounding. Other motifs from the existing neighborhoods could be used or drawn upon to break down the edges of the development and allow it to read more as part of the surrounding rather than an island.
- Canted piece of the building is gratuitous – does not blend with or create continuity of the existing urban fabric; calls attention to the building instead of the park. Additionally, Caroline Street is already very wide – no need to exaggerate view. The angle is NOT needed – in fact it makes it feel suburban.
- Block H is not oriented properly; if buildings cannot be reorganized to close mid-block gap at park, at least minimize the gap on the park side. Very important to create a strong block face along the edge of the new park.
- Lot B is over parked – too much asphalt; sensitivity to interior of block is needed. The amenity spaces will not be enjoyable with that much paving, vehicular circulation and outdoor waste management.
- Attend to dark corners and dead ends as the design develops.

### **Building:**

- Bedrooms at the corner should be reconfigured – move these off corners to allow for more prominence (flip the living room / bedroom).
- Strongly implore team to go back and explore previous comments, not just for blocks B and H, but for the entire master plan.
- Building on Block H – if it is so important for to acknowledge the park, the team should look at simply set the entry of the building back a bit, rather than canting the building.
- Park elevations are seen from afar – opportunity to be more formal instead of the same pavilion vocabulary; no need to break up the façade so much. More appropriate for park elevations to be monolithic, with a graceful 4-story motif that is larger in scale to highlight the park.

- Outdoor space associated with town houses are not generous enough (need more than 10') to allow more use and some degree of privacy.
- Because this is evolving one block at a time, it seems as if buildings were designed first and park was an afterthought – plan, as a whole, needs more “big picture thinking” / focus on the making of a neighborhood. Team needs to imagine the end product and work backwards.
- Is there an opportunity to have more variety of languages or give the design language more range in proportion, volume, etc. Because everything is the same height, more variation is needed to give the park more prominence.
- Eliminate basket balconies that the corners to allow for more volume of surface material instead of breaking it up.
- While contemporary style of buildings is welcome and encouraged, it is necessary to transition materiality on new buildings instead of abrupt difference from the surrounding neighborhood – integrate some familiar materials and motifs, reconnect.
- Stepping back of building form and focus on breaking up the massing is more appropriate for taller, higher density developments. Emphasis should fall on knitting the low-rise urban fabric tighter together and in a manner that’s reflective of similarly scaled neighborhoods in Baltimore.
- Important to address what happens across Eden Street – and what happens at the rear of the houses is undefined – not a normal rowhouse condition with it so open at the rear – does it get fenced? Same challenge as will existing Perkins Homes site - no differentiation between public / private space, all paved with trash in the middle.

Eden Street does not promise a rowhouse stoop-style streetscape with current light-industrial/autobody garage facades and high-density zoning designation for future development. Therefore, the location of rowhouses in that area is unwarranted and further undermined by their limited numbers and fragmented configuration. Project team needs to revisit the proposed design for that area as well as other comments provided in a previous review with respect to various parts of the masterplan.

**Next Steps:**

Continue design and engage in a potential design session with Planning Department staff and UDAAP member in order to help address comments above.

**Attending:**

Matt Flament, Keval Thakkar – HCM Architects  
Sasha Angus, Tim Pula – Beatty Development

Melody Simmons, S. Stern, B. Brooks, David Ferguson – Attendees

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

Stacy Freed – DHCD

Lembit Jogi – HABC

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