

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

**Date:** November 10, 2022

**Meeting #70**

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**Project:** Greenmount Multi-Family Building

**Phase:** Schematic Design

**Location:** Greenmount Ave. at Chase St., Johnston Square

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

The project is making its first presentation to UDAAP and is in the Schematic Design phase. The developer is Somerset Development / ReBUILD Metro and the Architect is Quinn Evans Architects. Jake Stern of Somerset Development introduced the project and gave background on the community process that this building came from. In March of 2020 the Baltimore City Planning Commission accepted the community-driven Johnston Square Vision Plan. The development team is a partnership with ReBUILD Metro holding a Land Disposition Agreement with Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development.

Alfred Davalos of Quinn Evans continued the presentation. The team spent time researching the site, and strove to reflect the surrounding context. The site is located on Greenmount Avenue between Biddle and Chase Streets. There is a public park immediately behind the building, which is not part of this project, but the team was careful to consider that future public space in their design. The building is meant to act as a gateway and navigates the Greenmount edge with a one-story volume containing retail space.

The team's main goal with this project was to connect to the future park.

**DISCUSSION:**

The Panel thanked the team for the presentation and moved into clarifying questions and comments.

- *Is the park going to be a park or a football field?* This has not been decided yet, but it the master plan shows this space as a sports field.

- *Why is the corner of Greenmount at Biddle the main focus for retail?* The Johnston Square Vision Plan is trying to focus retail development toward the intersections of Biddle and Greenmount. This proposal was based heavily on the Vision Plan.
- *Is a landscape architect part of the project team and, if so, how involved with the project are they?* There is a landscape architect assigned to the project, but the team has not engaged the landscape architect much at this point in the design.
- *You mentioned the complete streets focus; what elements satisfy that goal?* There are trees, planters and they have set the building back to allow for wider sidewalks. The parking access moved to the Chase Street side to minimize the interactions between cars, bicycles and pedestrians.
- *Is there outdoor space on the roof (besides the greenhouse)?* There is a resident terrace and the greenhouse is still a moving target. The greenhouse would potentially be used by a non-profit, create opportunities for fresh produce, and job-training for residents and work opportunities.
- *The team mentioned the green ribbon; will you be removing a few parking spaces to make that path through the building and the parking lot safer and more direct?* Yes, the team would be willing to consider reducing the amount of parking to ensure a safer pedestrian path.
- *Is the outdoor space at the north edge going to be passive or programmed?* This space is meant to compliment whatever use happens in the commercial space; the team imagines this will be programmed by the commercial tenant.
- *Please clarify the developer of the park.* ReBUILD is working with St. Francis and Parks and People on the development of the park.
- *You mentioned a response to comments, where did those comments come from?* They are a mix of internal comments, comments from residents, and from the Planning Department.

**Site:**

- The team talked about goals to create a complete street; incorporating a landscape architect sooner will help to make meaningful pedestrian connections, create the proper flow around the building, and help to locate the building in a way that makes sense with the existing urban fabric. This will positively impact the team's ability to create a complete street – creating meaningful connections and inviting streetscape is key to having the street feel complete.
- The landscape architect needs to be involved in planning the green buffers, street tree spacing, etc. These elements will help to shape the street and make it an inviting space.

- The streetscape needs to deliberate and intentional to really respond to the notion of Complete Streets.
- The goal to connect to the park can also be better accomplished with a landscape architect on board – the landscape architect is not there just for plant selection after the fact.
- The outdoor spaces need to be intentional and purposeful otherwise the space will be a blank slate that people won't know how to use – it will create future dead zones. Think through what should happen to the north of the commercial at Biddle and Greenmount and shape the space with landscape elements.
- Greenhouse partnership with the non-profit, engaging schools and residents is very exciting and can enrich the neighborhood. The management piece is critical; if the non-profit partner is on board, the Panel thinks this will be very exciting.
- The biggest challenge for this project team seems to be the unknown future of the park. There is a desire to connect people to the park visually, but the surface parking lot is a major barrier.
- Consider using Chase Street as a connection from Greenmount to the park – use the south edge as an opportunity to connected to the park.
- The Panel is not convinced that a direct connection through the building and the parking lot is the best approach. The building could be setback from Chase and use landscape elements to encourage pedestrian activity.
- Project team is encouraged to actively collaborate with the park planners to think through where the connections between this new development and the future park should be.
- Parking dictates the western edge of the site; if there is willingness to lose some of the parking, there can be a better buffer. Having a buffer between the parking lot and the future park will improve the relationship between the building site and the park.
- The only known for this project is currently the site as it exists – now is the time to form the building in such a way that it truly connects to the park. This project team has designed a surface parking lot without screening, which makes it the problem of the future park rather than making moves to connect the building to the park.

**Building:**

- It does not matter what the future park's program is or how it is laid out. It is the project team's responsibility to grasp the opportunity to revitalize the Greenmount corridor *and* make a park-adjacent building. As designed, the building is cut off from the park with the parking lot placement.

- Other projects in Baltimore work very hard to conceal the parking; this design does not do that. With the parking lot where it is, the building turns its back on the park. Especially because this building is the first building of many proposed by the Johnston Square Vision Plan, the standard needs to be high. This project will set the stage for the future buildings.
- Reactionary response to comments will not help the design progress; consider comments offered in this review thoughtfully as you move ahead. As the design changes, pause and consider whether the design response has addressed the intent of the comment.
- Building form and facade:
  - It is evident that program fits on site, but need to look at the bigger picture and understand the site holistically. Even without knowing the full program of the future park, the building can be designed to take advantage of the site and the future asset to the west.
  - There is existing context on Greenmount, Biddle and Chase sides – these are important parameters to respond to. The different sides of the building should respond to the various existing conditions on these three sides, while also striving to connect the building to the park.
  - The façade elements are not clearly defined or organized in a purposeful manner. The program should be meaningfully represented and drive the form and façade of the building while also responding to the neighborhood context. This is an opportunity to rethink some of the moves and resolve the form and façade in a way that makes sense from within and out – the building is a balance between program and urban context.
  - Pushing and pulling of the building volume does not yet feel intentional – the façade along Greenmount is not responding to the team’s intent. The team mentioned that the north facing walls that occur in response to the building setbacks are to signal entrances, but they are not reading this way.
  - The community space is so recessed that it may cause future unintended issues.
  - The ribbon is an afterthought, the connection is an afterthought. Despite the claim that connecting to the park was a main driver of the project, it is clear that the building came before the connection.
  - It is very important to take a step back and consider how people will use the spaces. It appears as though the building was drawn based on the number of units and then because of budget, parking was just tacked onto the rear of the site. Stop drawing a “building” and begin to draw how people will use the space. Use this to inform the building massing, how it engages with the users, how it informs the façade elements.

- o There needs to be a more deliberate relationship between the ground and the building façade. The building lands abruptly without any transition.
  - o The wrapping of the retail around the corner is appreciated, but the adjacent space needs more work.
  - o Commercial on at the corner of Biddle and Greenmount will be a welcome addition to the neighborhood. The building across the street to the north is problematic, as it has a large parking lot at the corner directly facing the proposed commercial. The Panel hopes this project encourages future infill development on surface lots like the one across Biddle Street.
  - o To the west of the commercial space at the corner of Biddle and Greenmount, the parking is extremely visible. If the building extends further to the north and really wraps the edge more fully, the parking will be screened better.
  - o Consider turning the interior units on Chase out toward the park to screen the parking on that side and begin to enclose/screen the parking around the periphery.
  - o Effort needs to be put into more cohesive and thoughtful building form that responds both to the proposed uses and to the site. Develop a robust strategy for all of the sides of the building.
- Materiality.
    - o The massing and façade organization are flawed; develop materiality that isn't rooted in a cliché of Baltimore brick. It's important for new development to respond to and honor the character of the existing neighborhood while also adding something new.
    - o The building feels ad-hoc, rather than deliberate. Consider the material selection within the context of the project and within the context of the wider neighborhood.
  - Moving ahead with design:
    - o The project is off to a good start in understanding the site challenges. You have a functional program that is well-understood. Now that that project team has a firm understanding of the site and building program, take a step back and consider what is working and what needs more study.
    - o It is evident there is a good understanding of the building dimensions and the site. The team is encouraged to back up to a more diagrammatic concept level.
    - o Use the team's understanding of program and remove the details to help understand the massing. Using a very simple approach – a simple massing model with color based on program elements is all you need. Using a very simple

model will help the team see how the program fits on the site as you explore ideas about connection and screening the parking as *drivers* of the design.

- o Comments are meant to make this project a smashing success. Panel has full faith in the project team and looks forward to seeing how this project develops and moves forward.

**Next Steps:**

Address the panels comments above and work with Planning staff on next steps.

**Attending:**

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

Tamara Woods, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette – Planning