

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

Date: November 10, 2022

Meeting #70

Project: Henrietta Lacks Building

Phase: Schematic Design

Location: Johns Hopkins Medical Campus, Eager Park

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

The project is making its first presentation to UDAAP and is in the Schematic Design phase. The developer is Johns Hopkins University and the architect is Vine Architects. Lee Coyle, Senior Director of Planning and Architecture for Johns Hopkins, introduced the project. Victor Vines, Architect, continued the presentation by introducing the rest of the team, which includes Mahan Rykiel.

The project's main goals are to:

1. Recognize and raise awareness of Henrietta Lacks' legacy; her extraordinary contribution to clinical research and the advancement of health throughout the world.
2. Promote Johns Hopkins University's commitment to developing trust with their patients, their families, and their community.
3. Enhance participation and partnership with members of the community in research that can benefit the community.
4. Symbolize a gateway for the community of Eager Park to the Johns Hopkins East Baltimore Campus.
5. Be a place of learning, discoveries and dialogue.

The project site is approximately 60' x 100' or about 1/7 of an acre, at the corner of Ashland and Rutland Street. The project will share a parcel with Deering Hall.

The project team began the outreach before the Pandemic began and worked closely with the Lacks family and the community. The input from the family and community helped to shape the building. The team shared early sketches, which show an idea about letting the site come into the building – permeability, discourse and dialog drove the design. The building strive to be an extension of the Eager Park and acts as a mixing zone between the neighborhood and the medical community. The resulting building is meant to have a delicate scale that mediates between Deering Hall, which is relatively small, and the larger medical buildings.

The building features a green roof and is stepped back at the ground level to provide additional green space at the front. There is a prefunction space located at the corner, and this room will be collaboration space for students and also act as a forum space for the community. To showcase this space, the team wanted to make this feature transparent. To further invite the community, the building has a zero-grade entry. The building envelope is inspired by tidewater quilting, the iconic dress of Ms. Lacks, and the helical cell structure.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the presentation and reminded the team that the next presentation will pick up where this presentation left off. The Panel also thanked the team for including insights into how the design developed and why certain decisions were made before moving into clarifying questions and comments.

- *How is the team going to continue the community outreach as the project develops?* The project team as a plan to come back to the community soon. They plan to revisit with the various community groups and Lacks family sooner rather than later, so as to not give the
- *The existing raised garden beds in the back of the site – is this an important community place where people come together?* No, this is simply an empty lot.
- *Is the green roof intensive or extensive?* The third floor is extensive and the other roof is undecided.
- *Are all of the community spaces located at the corner?* Yes, that is correct.
- *Please clarify the conceptual relationship between the new building and Deering Hall.* The team studied the building form against the various constraints of the small site, the circulation needs, the FAR, etc.
- *Is the diamond pattern of the building envelope structural?* No this is not part of the curtainwall, it is a separate layer and meant to modulate the sun – it is meant to act as a screen.
- *Please clarify who exactly will be using the forum space?* The building is going to be used by Johns Hopkins, primarily. There are two multi-use rooms that would hold lectures, and the prefunction room. This will be a lively building, and the ground floor will be available for the community to use.
- *For the more permanent users, are their break spaces on the upper floors or will these features be located on the ground floor?* The causal spaces are located on the same level as the workspaces.

Site:

- It was extremely helpful to see the project goals – this helps to clarify the proposed design and why certain decisions were made regarding program organization and various building elements.
- It is important to return to the community as a part of the process, sooner rather than later as the design progresses, to continue to establish trust. If you are interested in their input, they need to see the design as it progresses, not just at the end.
- The transparency of the façade lends to the building feeling as if it is part of the landscape. The permeability and openness are appreciated but will need to be constantly active to achieve the goal of being a part of the community.
- Universal access both help the building feel neutral – everyone comes in the same way (not stair vs. ramp). This is a very successful move.
- The element at the corner mirrors the stoop culture of Baltimore.
- A variety of flexible workspaces, and outdoor green roof cocoon is very successful. This feels like an intimate setting but can also be a group space.
- Streetscape and tree canopy are appreciated. The roof will lend itself to the feeling of a lush outdoor space, as well.
- Because of the visual permeability of the building, the landscape participates in what is happening on the interior of the building.
- While green spaces are limited, but where they do exist, the team should consider adding seating to make them more inviting.
- Public art is successful in activating the corner – it reinforces the indoor / outdoor relationship of the building.
- Program is organized skillfully on a tight site. The team used the constraints to enrich the site. The ground floor is successful – steps are only introduced to negotiate the grade change along Ashland.

Building:

- The Panel has concerns of the building having so much transparency and not enough programming at the ground level. It is critical to have people in the space continuously. Ensuring ongoing activity will help this space to feel like a hub rather than an empty corporate lobby.
- Podium wrapping the corner could be improved with a more organic use – this can happen by having the seating wrapping around to encourage informal, organic activity around the building.

- Massing diagrams are extremely helpful in understanding how the building massing arrived at its proposed shape. The gasket piece connecting the new and old buildings is not yet as successful as some of the other moves. The historic structure is so significantly different from the new building which is much lighter and airier. The connection piece follows some of the regulating lines set by the existing brick building, but it does not quite seem integrated and needs more study.
- The exoskeleton diagrid is a nice touch and is beginning to work as a way to tell the story. The transition up at the edge may be a bit too much – opportunity to refine this element more as the project moves forward. The way the exoskeleton wraps the corner structural vertical member feels heavy and interrupts the lightness of the screen.
- Overall relationship with the existing context and intentional manner in how the program fits on site are appreciated.
- Not clear how the main entry operates yet. Can it be configured to serve as a connector and transition between indoor and outdoor activity and less a single-use entry vestibule.
- Team is encouraged to dig a bit deeper into two of the specific goals offered at the outset of the presentation. The goal of really engaging the community in the ground floor of the building was stated, and the Panel urges the team to study the notion of “lobby” or “entry” – the work spaces will function differently based on the design. The ground floor has the pieces, but the double door vestibule is undermining the intent. This approach does not break the status quo of inside / outside. There is an opportunity to think more openly about this and redefine the traditional approach to an “entry” in the interest of a more integrated design and the spirit of creating a more welcoming and experience.
- The sculptural stair is beautiful, but if it is not truly inviting it will feel alienating. Use the design to invite activity here and really enliven the stair by making the space next to it a destination, rather than a pass-through.
- The team is urged to rethink the whole ground floor sequence – right now the program reads as a series of spaces to move through, rather than having a main space where everyone is welcome – a “there-there” space.
- Concern for the sharp edge between building and sidewalk. There is an opportunity to refine the edge – with a yard, a stoop, a porch, a loggia. These elements from the existing urban design language of the neighborhood will help the new building fit in more and allow for a series of transitions from outdoor to indoor, rather than an abrupt shift.
- The exoskeleton bio mimicry is not unique to this building and from an architecture standpoint it is fine. However, the reference may be too literal here – Ms. Lacks’ personal cells were taken and became part of the public domain without her consent.

Cell reference being put on a very public display may seem voyeuristic and send the wrong message. The façade doesn't have to change completely, but it should add to the discourse about medicine, personal autonomy, etc.

- Use the façade to celebrate and honor Ms. Lacks legacy in a more sensitive and subtle way. The approach should read more dignified rather than exploitative.

Next Steps:

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

Attending:

Victor Vines, Robert Thomas, Stacy Ko, Stephan Kelly, Vershae Hite – Project Team
Jennifer Mielke, Lee Coyle – Johns Hopkins

Andrew Rentschler, Ariana Parrish, Chrystal Okonta, Coretta Bennett, Ed Gunts, Elly Burke, Jamie Smith, Jeanne Hitchcock, Jeffrey Kahn, Jennifer Carter, Joseph Mayzck, Kern Johnson, Kristen Waltz, Liz Vandendreissche, Matt Hooke, Megan Christin, Michael Preston, Peter Smith, Rob Mello - Attendees

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

Tamara Woods, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, Imani Jasper – Planning