

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: May 11, 2023

Meeting #77

Project: McMechen Multi-Family (former Pedestal Gardens site)

Phase: Schematic II

Location: 1512 Eutaw Place, Madison Park

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Keval Thakker (HCM) reintroduced the project with an overview of the site context and then continued with a series of diagrams showing the site analysis. This project consists of two (2) multi-family housing buildings, which will replace the existing Pedestal Gardens multi-family housing. The site is located at the corner of Eutaw Place and McMechen Street in Madison Park, both of which are broad boulevards with planted medians. The northwest side of the site is bounded by Madison Avenue, a rowhouse street with very stately Italianate 3-story homes.

The team worked to revise the massing and landscape elements based on the Panel’s previous comments. The new massing reduces the gap between the buildings along McMechen Street as requested by the Panel and prioritizes a connection between the green amenity space on site and the neighboring park to the south on Eutaw Street. The entry points have shifted to accommodate grade changes and access to the parking lot.

The team worked to resolve the following architecture goals:

1. Explore how to redefine the architectural massing and major elements;
2. Building footprint should respond to easement & reduce gap between buildings; and
3. Buildings should address the adjacent boulevards and react to the unique opportunity provided by adjacent green spaces.

Zach Baier of Floura Teeter continued the presentation by addressing the landscape comments. The team focused most of their efforts on developing the landscape program and considering how the buildings and landscape could reinforce each other to benefit the residents and the neighbors. The design now

features greening and a programmed open space at the corner of Mosher and Madison (the southernmost tip of the site). The team worked to resolve the following:

- Paved path cutting through the middle of the parking lot feels arbitrary... There are better places for the pedestrian paths... They need to be integrated in the site design;
- The outdoor spaces feel wedged in and leftover... Differentiate between what is outdoor hangout space for adults, play space for kids, dumpsters, parking;
- Arrange the parking differently to provide more green space and give more of a buffer while also connecting more toward Madison Park;
- Connect the building to the green spaces – allow the patios to look at each other, to have a relationship, not simply get tucked in around the parking lot.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation, and for addressing many of the comments and noted the expertise of the resident Landscape Architect, Sharon Bradley, is missing from the Panel today. Ms. Bradley has provided comments based on the draft presentation, and those comments will be incorporated into the notes.

The Panel continued with questions and comments together.

Clarification:

- *Is there an opportunity to move the entry of the building on Madison slightly toward McMechen?* The entry is placed to take advantage of the layout and the grade; the team was trying to balance the cut and fill and provide access to both to the street and to the parking lot.
- *There is a lot of grade change, and the building does not step down, which means that there will be several feet of foundation visible. What is the plan for the base of the building as the grade drops away?* The team is looking at both landscape and architectural options. There are many buildings within the nearby context that have very prominent bases, and the team is looking at how they can address the base in a way that is sensitive to the surrounding historic context while also addressing the street.
- *What are the parking aisle widths?* They are 22' wide and the parking is at 1:2 per unit instead of 1:1, so the asphalt has been greatly reduced. The team will seek a variance for the parking.
- *Is the building face right at the property line on Madison Avenue?* The building is set back about 4.5 feet from the property line.
- *What is the intent of the green space along Mosher? Will there be a fence along that edge or will it be open to the public?* This portion of the site will be exclusive to the residents of Buildings A and B – the design includes a fence along this edge.

Site:

- The Panel is pleased that the team took a big step back, and by taking that step, the project has been much improved. The landscape and massing improvements will make the project a much better neighbor.
- All of the adjustments to the plan are welcomed; Panel feels that the changes have helped to improve the design.
- The edges have been transformed, which changes the entire nature of the project and how it is experienced from the outside in. Providing a great continuous outdoor green space will benefit not only the residents, but also the neighbors.
- The project feels lightyears ahead of what was presented last time. Panel is eager to see improvement as the project continues to move forward.
- Access to the building is important and Panel acknowledges the grades can be a challenge to locating the entry. The Eutaw side entrance makes sense, but the Madison Street side would benefit if the team could find a way to move the entrance more toward McMechen. Moving the entrance would allow the façade to feel more balanced. Look at addressing the entry by reconfiguring two aspects of the layout:
 - Parking – team is showing a double drive-aisle but there is an opportunity to have a one-way loop instead and moving parking tucked under Building B to the leg of the building on McMechen. This would give more green space (5' or 10') back and give some flexibility to where that access point is from the parking lot.
 - Floor plan – the units could be rearranged to allow for the entrance to be shifted. See more detailed comments below with regard to the building layout.
- The connection between the community space is purely visual – it would be better if there was a way to connect these spaces with an element that opened onto the park (team noted earlier that to balance cut and fill, there is a grade change between the ground floor of the building and the neighboring park that requires stairs).
- Having a primary green space to connect the buildings is a far better experience than trying to connect through the parking lot. The primary relationship between the buildings is now through the green space, which is a much stronger connection, especially if there is no other shared program within the building.
- Team is cautioned to err on the side of simplification – think through who the residents are and how they will use the space. Simplification will promote clarity about the intended uses. Additionally, there will likely be budget concerns, so giving more priority and synergy to the proposed program will help to ensure that important program is not deemed unnecessary, and thus, at risk for being eliminated.
- To continue to previous points about synergy and simplification, could the grill area move toward the play area and be simplified? There could be a great opportunity for parents to grill and socialize while allowing their children play nearby within their line of sight.

- The green space is moving in the right direction, but more study of the program is needed for it to feel very intentional. The team is encouraged to find program that is compatible with its location.
- Connection strengthens the overall connection with the neighborhood. Despite the green space not being open to the public, it will still be a preferred path for neighbors moving between Madison and Mound Park. This change helps the project feel more like it is part of a continuation of the neighborhood.
- Plant trees in the median will be critical to the views between the building. Median is essential in providing a tree canopy between the buildings, which will provide shade, privacy and enhanced views out from the residential units.

Building:

- Entrance locations need more study.
 - Provide one more iteration of the plan (for Building B) focused on consolidating the program designated to the community use (lobby, lounge, admin, etc.) and rearrange the residential units so there are not units wedged in between community uses.
 - The elevator and one stack of units can move over to accommodate an entrance closer to the corner, which makes more sense for the façade as it develops.
 - Having the entrance make sense with the overall façade will be important to the overall balance of the building as the team proceeds with the architecture.
 - The elevator and one stack of units could be moved over to accommodate a relocation of the entry.
 - Panel feels that the entry could either get closer to McMechen or Mosher, but the current position feels random. Allowing the entry to continue to be disproportionate with the façade and will present issues as the team begins to organize the windows and vertical design elements.
 - There is a negotiation between the inside layout and the exterior perception, and the team must consider the project from both as the project takes shape.
- Massing feels more appropriate for the neighborhood and the Panel feels the architecture will continue to develop now that the building footprints are somewhat settled.
- Closing the aperture between the buildings on McMechen allows this side to read as continuous, which strengthens the existing urban fabric and builds on it.
- Consolidating the uses in both buildings will help to organize the façades as they develop. These uses can be expressed on the exterior of the building, which will benefit the architecture.
- Clarification and consolidation of the program will also help with how the buildings flow from the point of the floor plan, but also how they read on the exterior.
- Having the portion of the building that is dedicated to community use read differently will allow for the building to have a more prominent presence.

- Team is cautioned to not replicate architectural elements all around the building as the project moves from a simple massing diagram to more detailed elevations. Reflect on the adjacent streets, each side needs to have an analysis of what is there. The project must answer the question, “so what?” when examining the context to indicate how the design of the new buildings respond to each different side.
- There are some similarities between McMechen and Eutaw, and some similarities between Mosher and Madison, but the architecture won’t be successful if it is simply applied liberally without consideration for the nuance of the various conditions.
- Each street will give clues about how the different sides of the building should be articulated.
 - Madison Street should pick up on the rowhouses across the street;
 - Mosher will need to address Mound Park, the sides of buildings and the mid-block rowhouses facing the site;
 - The grand boulevards will present another challenge – the façades on Eutaw and McMechen will be viewed in totality because of the wideness of the boulevards.
 - For the boulevard sides of the building, it will be important to consider how the entire façade is perceived since it will be viewed as a whole. The façade on Madison will also be perceived as a whole from corner at McMechen.
 - The southernmost point of the site (at Mosher and Madison) will always be viewed from the corner, so it will never be perceived as an entire elevation.
- As the building continues to develop, set some rules. The overall building can be proportioned into chunks using the following logic:
 - Define 3 or so parts of the building that can read as volumes and scale these appropriately to the building.
 - 300’ or so feet will feel very large on the longer façades if they are not scaled more appropriately; grouping the masses in a logical and organized way (related to the program) will help immensely.
 - The corner of McMechen and Eutaw is prominent and contains retail, which makes sense for this to be one volume. Start from the corner and take the entire volume to the right (toward Madison) to allow this piece to read as one volume and gateway.
 - Opportunity to do some well-proportioned volumes, rather than trying to chop the façade up too much.
 - Develop the pieces on McMechen to read as one architectural expression, and the more public program further south to read as another. The in-between piece is residential, so the architectural expression will naturally be quieter.
 - Volume at the interior corner on Eutaw will become very important and can anchor the project.

- Organize the project into groups of important highlighted volumes (A) and more respectful, quiet in-between pieces (B).
- Start from this diagrammatic level to set up hierarchy and proportions before getting too far into the details. Once the overall language and rules for organizing the building are clear, the rest of the details can be resolved.

Additional site comments provided by Ms. Sharon Bradley, Panelist not in attendance, prior to the scheduled UDAAP review:

- Site plan is an improvement- thank you for your responsiveness.
- McMechen Street is more appropriately addressed with building frontage rather than parking, and there is a more deliberate open-space and pedestrian circulation plan. Connections to green spaces in and around the site are much improved.
- Still, there are units opening directly onto parking, and the parking lot still dominates the central area. It also sharply divides the buildings from each other- they're only connected (visually and functionally) by the green thread at the edge rather than feeling like a cohesive community.
- The building facing Eutaw is certainly the better place to live: surrounded by green space and views to parks. The other building is not nearly as well-positioned. Is there a way to better connect this building to the green open-space system you've started to develop?
- How is trash handled?
- The green spaces will need significant screening from the parking to feel park-like.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above. Meet with Planning and CHAP staff to resolve questions before continuing for CHAP review.

Attending:

Keval Thakkar, Santosh Chandane – HCM
 Kevin Anderson, Scott Rose – KWC Engineering Technologies
 Matt Ellingson – Floura Teeter
 Pat Wagner, Sathya Moorthy – Community Builders

Omar Hanza, Derek Moore, Stephanie Hanley, Ted Ludvigsen, Lee Tawney, Keshontae Lewis, James Prost, David Nyweide, Antoinette, Charles Duff, Jacqueline Alexander – Attendees

Ed Guntz – Baltimore Fishbowl
 Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal

Pavline Ilieva* and Osborne Anthony – UDAAP Panel
Ren Southard**, Caitlin Audette, Matt Desantis, Eric Tiso, Chad Hayes – Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff