

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 24, 2022

Meeting #58

Project: Perkins Phase 5 Buildings - Blocks C & I

Phase: Schematic Design

Location: East Baltimore

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Keval Thakkar of HCM began the presentation with a brief introduction and Matt Flament, also representing HCM, continued with an overview and update of the project. It was noted that the next UDAAP presentation will be for sites H and D at the end of March 2022. Some of the earliest phases of this years-long project are already built or in construction, while other phases are awaiting permits.

The presentation for these sites, known as Block C and Block I, highlighted how the team has responded to comments from the Panel about the overall master plan. The team has applied comments to this portion of the site, including paying attention to the gaps between buildings, addressing alley conditions, overall circulation, and views into and out of the various redevelopment blocks.

Block C: This site will have two multi-family buildings (4-story), the historic firehouse building (proposed to be a community center), and three sticks of townhouses (3-story). The site plan has one entry point from Eden Street, and parking has been tucked below buildings wherever possible. Building plans have become more developed based on previous comments. The team focused on integrating the new buildings with the remaining historic buildings, breaking down the larger massings to address the various scales around the site.

Block I: Half of this site will be developed in a later phase by another entity. The west portion of the site (along Eden Street) is proposed to have two buildings within this phase and scope. Both buildings will be multi-family housing (4-story). The buildings have been designed as L-shaped forms to hold the north and south corners of the block, with a gap in the middle of the block between the buildings. The parking is located behind the buildings, with a mid-block entrance at Eden Street, and another (presumably exit only) at Lombard Street. A north-south alley at the middle of the block (between the west site in this phase, and the east site in a future phase) was not proposed in the presented layout.

DISCUSSION:

The panel thanked the team for the presentation and continued with clarifying questions. The discussion focused on buildings and site together but addressed the sites one at a time.

Clarifications

- *Why are the buildings on Block I separated into two buildings versus simply having one building?* Fire access was a main driver of the building organization and density (efficiency). Mostly circulation, not necessarily utility of the building.
- *Is the other building on Block I beyond the team's scope, meaning the building will be designed by someone else?* Yes, this building is out of the team's scope. The team made decisions about parking, access and frontage of their buildings based on the presumed future layout of the other (east) portion of Block I.
- *What is across the street from Block I on Eden Street?* Low scale industrial buildings, one and two story, a mix of 3-story and townhouses. Eden Street becomes more residential moving south.
- *Is there ability to change the paving located directly behind the firehouse community center?* Yes, there is a parking lot there now, but what is shown is proposed, meaning it would be new and could be changed if there was rationale.
- *Townhouse typology – the rowhouses are always expressed as separate (not attached) from the higher density buildings. Has the team explored a condition where those elements touch to eliminate gaps?* The team has explored this concept, but it was not favored with the overall master plan language.
- *Is there a plan to work with the eastern edge of Block I or is the plan to control the edge in the most effective way possible with the understanding that there will be no control beyond the western portion of the block?* The team has no control over the other site and is doing their best to anticipate and work with conditions resulting from that portion of the site. In short, yes, the strategy is to control the edge of the western portion of the block.
- *How does the trash and utility circulation work on each site?* Block I is anticipated to have trash trucks enter from Eden, pick up the trash at the interior of the site and exit on to Lombard Street. For Block C, the entrance and exit will be shared and the truck will enter the site, making a loop to exit.
- *What are the rough dimensions of the play area?* This area is roughly 50' x 40' – similar to the play areas on the other sites.

Block C:

- Green spaces will lend themselves to a park-like feel but only if the yards remain unfenced.
- Play area is too small for anything other than a tot-lot, and with the larger units there will be a more kids and families. Increasing the green space in both flexibility and area to accommodate a variety of play opportunities is important. Enlarging the play area will make it more meaningful.
- This block is going to have a greater need for green space and tree canopy in general. Perhaps parking can be sacrificed here – team is encouraged to see if they can squeeze the parking a bit.

- There is an ambiguity around the firehouse; approach this as a “shared space” and fold the existing building more into the overall design of the block. Opportunity to slightly tweak the parking to give the rear of the firehouse building more space by adjusting the turning radius for larger trucks.
- Slightly changing the parking configuration with fewer bays on the townhouse side will allow the lot to become narrower and give more space over to greening.
- Building façades can fragment the continuous read of the street frontage; use the building façades to help unify the block.
- Townhouses can create a continuous street edge if connected to Building B on Block C. As designed, this gap looks like a missing tooth – as a “from scratch” design, it’s important to eliminate these awkward conditions.
- Baltimore’s urban rowhouse language does not appear in sticks of 4, 5, or 6 houses except in the case of demolition. Holding the standard of a full block without gaps and developing a way to turn the corner will improve the overall design of the block.
- Location of trash could be better; as placed, residents will see it every time they come and go from the property. The fact that it is on access means that the view opens up on to the trash, which should be avoided. Iteration can help improve the view and may inform a more appropriate location for the trash enclosure.
- Concern about ground floor units at the corner of Bank and Caroline – the larger units pose a challenge, but the rigidity of the framework is getting in the way. Work to resolve the units in the unique condition of the gateway / corner building. This ground level condition might be a good place to create an exception to the rule the team has created for the rest of the site.
- The palette is fresh, playful – Panel cautions team to be careful of over-working the palette. The precedents are lovely, but the images shown have more surface area. With the smaller façades it will be helpful to simplify and edit them down to prevent too much visual noise.
- Townhouses create a “mini-me” version – the bases and overall proportions do not create a harmonious read, as designed. Perhaps the colors and material palette are ok to use in the towns, but they deserve to have their own language, their own proportions. Repetition can make them feel overdone – rethink the application of materials and allow the smaller residential to have its own read.
- Corner of Eden and Gogh is very visible – premium material will go a long way here since there is a gap between the corner unit and the adjacent unit. A premium material just in this area will create a much stronger edge and intentional end of row.
- Elevation – pavilion elements are ok, but the brick base appears flat, which can feel relentless. Introducing a break or reveal will help to organize the base and help to scale it more appropriately for the block and pedestrian experience.
- Landscape integrated with the building façade is appreciated.
- Refining the vertical elements of the multi-family building(s) will help to organize the façade and help it to read as more unified.
- Disconnection between the recess of the dark colors – more recess can help with the transition to the firehouse, as well. Stepping the buildings down near the firehouse is appreciated, but how it happens feels a bit forced. Better to use the materials to temper the changes and help transition between the new buildings and the historic firehouse.

Block I:

- Planting the interior edge will be key since the other side of the site is not under the team's control. Robust planting with intention (stormwater, etc.) is strongly encouraged.
- Another round of traffic circulation evaluation is needed. The arrival sequence for residents is not intuitive – the intersection is awkward and misaligned, which does not help the traffic pattern. Consider that the block directly to the west (across Eden) may have a different future configuration.
- Circulation could be improved with a revision that is more resident focused instead of focused on the trash circulation. Consider instead having the entrance / exits on Lombard and Pratt Streets, where a north-south alley street might want to be located in order to simplify circulation and limit curb cuts around the block periphery.
- Building placement and layout need to address what happens on the site in a more purposeful way. Study a configuration with a central driveway through the site as mentioned above. This will make the site safer and more usable. Study an alternative that will work for both the east and west sides of the full block.
- Massings seem underdeveloped for this portion of the site. The ratio of building to paving is not working. The team can improve this by increasing green space or reducing the height of the building to 3-story and covering more of the site. As designed, it is very eroded and driven by the parking lot. Imagining that every square inch of the site is precious, what would be worth putting there?
- The team has the ability to play with masses and create a more continuous street frontage along Eden Street. With the understanding that there is a specified density, the massing can be modulated along the parking side to accommodate density and parking needs – perhaps some of the height is reduced to give more continuous street frontage while still accommodating the economy of a double-loaded corridor.
- Iconic moment at Eden and Pratt is appreciated – this is a great opportunity to introduce a more dynamic corner, but the current proposal may not be the best approach.
 - The program doesn't warrant the design shown (residential units and a mail room).
 - Materials – if this is a prominent corner, then premium materials are preferable.
 - Windows – avoiding generic openings will lend to more refinement which can help the corner at Eden and Pratt feel more celebrated.
 - Corner at Eden and Lombard is more successful at addressing the corner while still referencing its program in an appropriate way.
- Brick is reading both as a plane and as volume, which creates ambiguity. Brick in the north building façade feels like a form, but the brick feels applied in the south building. Consider continuing the brick around the corner on the south building for this to read more as a form rather than an applied surface.
- Group punched openings to create a clearer organization in the façade.
- Massing is heavy handed in its response to the transition between the misaligned streets at Eden and Pratt. Boulder Commons precedent offers a good solution because the property lines are aligned despite the fact that the streets are not. Give the base back to the street grid, despite its misalignment, and allow the piece above to articulate the geometry.

- Arrange openings in a manner consistent with the window datum, in response to the misaligned street.
- Balance in the utilization of brick and panels, punched openings, etc. is more successful with the building at Eden and Lombard (the north building).

Next Steps:

Continue addressing the comments above as each building develops. Remember to include slides that address the masterplan in each of the UDAAP presentations for orientation purposes. Also, track comments provided from the Panel over Previous Design slides followed by updates.

Attending:

Tim Pula - Beatty Development

Keval Thakkar, Santosh Chandane, Matt Flament – HCM

Pam Askew, Trace Shaughnessy – McCormack Baron Salazar

Melody Simmons – BBJ

Messrs. Anthony, Bradley and Ilieva - UDAAP Panel

Kevin Gallaher, Lembit Jogi, Cynthia Newman-Lynch, – HABC

Stacy Freed, Jaye Matthews – DHCD

Ren Southard, Tamara Woods, Caitlin Audette, Matt DeSantis, Eric Tlso – Planning

David Ferguson, Precious Washington, Arlisa Anderson, Emma Weber, Klaus

Phillipsen, Steven Stern, Peter Smith, Allyson Carpenter, Chris Seiler, Taejun James Kim, Bart Harvey,

Brian Blodnikar, Amruta Mozarkar - Attendees