

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: August 3, 2023

Meeting #80

Project: Frederick Douglass HS & Joseph C. Briscoe MS/HS Academy

Phase: Schematic

Location: 2301 Gwynns Falls Parkway

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Planning Staff introduced this item, which is a Baltimore City Landmark, and must go to CHAP for final approval. The item is coming to UDAAP for design advice in anticipation of a future UDAAP meeting. Fred Mason with Baltimore City Schools introduced the design team and general program of the colocation of Frederick Douglass High School and Joseph Briscoe Academy. Amy McCarty with Samaha Architects then presented the site context and the existing conditions of the building and site.

Ms. McCarty shared the intention to demolish several elements including the ROTC wing, the smokestack, and a small corridor. The demolitions have already been reviewed by CHAP. New additions are proposed for Briscoe Academy, the main front entrance, and a stairwell and elevator tower. The proposal includes two separate drop-off loops, one for each school, as well as an enlarged parking lot at the middle of the campus.

Kristen Gideon with MK Consulting then presented the proposed landscape design of the building. She shared that the overall concept was to create a campus feel and link the disconnected site. The team wants the different parts of the campus to be connected by tree lined pathways, considering how students, staff, and visitors will access the site.

The historic entrance will be maintained as a prominent part of the architecture, however, as it is no longer the main entrance the stairs and path that connect it to Gwynns Falls Parkway, will be removed.

Additionally, each school will have their own separate outdoor space – with the large outdoor space at Frederick Douglass including a series of gathering spaces.

Ms. McCarty continued the presentation by sharing the proposed architecture including the additions for the main entrance and Briscoe Academy. These were designed to be clearly modern, but compatible with the historic building.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation and moved to clarifying questions and general discussion and comments.

Questions / Clarifications:

- *When you say students are crossing from Mondawmin, is there no signalized crossing?* There is a crosswalk across Gwynns Falls, but it is not signalized.
- *Does that mean that we're ok with this? Is it safe? Should it be modified?* We understand this is how students move in the site, we are working with the condition.
- *How do you access the building now?* The current primary access is at the northeast corner of the west wing.
- *There's some access from the south, is that ADA compliant the entire way? What is the anticipated percentage of students coming from the south?* We do not think it is used much by the students, it seems to be utilized more by the community walking to Mondawmin Mall.
- *Have you studied where most of the pedestrians are coming from? What have you observed or studied?* Most of the walkers from the community are coming from the south or east – most of the student pedestrians are coming from the bus and metro stops at Mondawmin
- *How many buses are anticipated?* 98% of students from Frederick arrive via MTA or walk to the school. At Briscoe 50% of students will arrive via yellow bus or van and 50% are dropped off by guardians.

In General:

- I haven't seen any mention of Frederick Douglass himself, every school campus should celebrate the legacy of the namesake. Hope this is celebrated in a meaningful expression for the students. Many ways to do this in an authentic way that can immerse students in his legacy.
- The biggest challenge here is that the historic building is so prominent, sits on very difficult topography, directly adjacent to Mondawmin Mall and Coppin State. Taken all together, the team needs to consider how can the design solution be more responsive to these unique circumstances.
- The outdoor area is a very large area, it's sitting in a very formal courtyard and introducing a form that formalizes it even more. Have you considered other options where the gathering spaces are coupled and there's a less formal?
- The biggest challenge to the site is the location of the access points and how they are connected, to clarify this the circulation system needs to be obvious to allow everyone to understand how to move through the campus.
- The alle at the historic entrance is too inviting and needs to be handled in a deliberate way that has meaning and intentionality. The ceremonial spaces and the educational spaces along the front edge of the building need to be in a spatial sequence where they relate to one another, and this then needs to be overlaid with the pedestrian circulation. If you're inviting students into a very large space the sidewalk then needs to accommodate the amount of people anticipated.

There need to be appropriately sized landings for entrances. This is important at both the south entrance and main entrance. Where is the plaza that grounds the space at the main entrance? How can you further develop this space to be a landing space.

- What function do you think the ceremonial space north of the auditorium will serve?
- Could the alle continue move north and connect to Gwynns Falls Parkway?
- The ADA access at Briscoe is very circuitous, need to create a universal entry sequence to the front door.
- The main courtyard is an elegant form, but doesn't have a reference to the space or the school. Make sure the form is relevant to the history somehow. Great to create many different spaces outside, however, they need to be separated both visually and acoustically
- Love the plant palette and focus on the school year.
- As you move through the design consider the types of programming happening at the central courtyard? Have they all been accommodated with the design? For example, how much auxiliary spaces will the greenhouse need and how will those be accommodated?
- Utilize ground level views of the arrival sequence as you're designing the space, consider how a student walks through and to these spaces.
- I enjoyed the formal character of the courtyard, maybe there's an opportunity to be tied into a greater narrative. Could it be the efforts of the civil rights movement through time?
- Too many curb cuts along Warwick – eliminate the second drive into the staff parking lot and potentially utilize one driveway for service and staff. Anything that can be done to minimize that condition would be great. As presented it interrupts the streetscape quite a bit.
- When you look at site and building, go back and take a look at English gardens from the romanticism mainly to get some thoughts about the processional aspect of how these gardens work, which celebrate very formal architecture.

Building:

- Reconsider how you accommodate this historic building. Ensure that the new entry is really distinct from the historic structure. Don't think the angled addition is prominent enough, or tied into the historic building enough. Consider how the addition can be more formalized to connect with the historic building which has such a stark hierarchy.
- The building is massive and you don't understand it through the formal plan and will never see more than two elevations at once. Consider a scenario where the new entry addition is part of a more formal sequence that faces the street. What this would do is provide more visibility and create an easy to understand sequence. Consider how you can arrive on access from the north. What that might necessitate is shortening the vehicular loop, maybe widen it and create a more generous arrival zone and plaza. The windows at the auditorium that would connect to the plaza would create a really great space architecturally, then you would no longer need the ceremonial

landscape space to the north of the auditorium. That alone would help you solve some of these issues from arrival and sequence.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above, and continue review with CHAP

Attending:

Pavlina Illieva, Osborne Anthony, Sharon Bradley - UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, Lauren Schiszik, Chris Ryer - Planning