

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 24, 2022

Meeting #58

Project: 21st Century Schools – Furley Elementary School

Phase: Schematic

Location: 4633 Furley Ave, Baltimore MD 21206

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Paul Bradshaw of Grimm + Parker introduced the project and team. The panel will be reviewing the project for site organization and massing. The scope of the project is full replacement of the elementary school (approximately 85,000 GSF) – in addition the recreation center. The new building is oriented toward Furley Ave. to re-establish a strong urban presence. The massing has been organized to be respectful to the surrounding neighborhood context, which is comprised of many single-family detached- and semi-detached homes.

The site is located at the corner of Furley and Sipple Avenues. The far northeast corner is the highest grade on site and the building is proposed to be located in approximately the same footprint as the former school building, down the hill from this northeast corner. A grand stair is proposed to lead students into the main entrance, visible from the northeast. Accessible routes are included, as well.

The project team has asked the Panel to note that they are preparing the building for future installation of photovoltaic panels. At this stage in the design, the team is still exploring materials and canopy structures.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the presentation team and began with clarifying questions before continuing with the general discussion and comments.

- *Where are students coming from and how are they arriving on site?* Difficult to know for sure since this school site has been closed for 4 years, and with Covid distancing requirements leading to online classes, but City Schools estimates that 40% - 60% of the students will be walking to school, with the others will be arriving by car. There are 3-4 busses for special needs students.
- *What is the intention of the diagonal path from the east if the students will typically be using the front doors?* The path is in response to the change of grade as an accessible path to enter the recreation center.

Site & Circulation:

- Consider arrival sequence and collection space for students; children are apt to gather in groups and congregate – this needs to be a design consideration. If well-designed, it will help direct how and where congregating happens and allow it to be purposeful and coordinated within the larger function of the site.
- The circulation around the site needs more study – more accommodation at the various nodes around the site; these areas should also anticipate and invite gathering. Since students will gather anyway, better to direct them with design.
- Connection and continuity of sidewalks around the site – consider how the sidewalk running west on Furley continues into the neighborhood; look beyond the limits of the site to inform how the site circulation develops.
- Bus drop-off area could be reduced for clarity and to give more meaningful ADA access.
- Drop-off at the corner is less than ideal and will create congestion. Accommodate for this to happen in another location to ensure better control over the drop-off experience. Note that if parents are having a difficult time with drop-off, it will start to unravel and happen wherever is most convenient or quickest, not necessarily where it is safest.
- Consider when students feel that they have “arrived” at school – is it when they see the building, when they enter the site or when they enter the building? The team is encouraged to explore the intention of arrival and consider inviting the arrival sequence sooner.
- The current design pushes the pedestrian circulation toward sidewalk, but there is an opportunity to bring the students into the site sooner by creating intentional paths into the site. The proposed circulation within the site lends itself well to this comment and could be connected with a few well-placed intersecting paths.
- Rethink how Marx Ave. connects to the school driveway and the pedestrian circulation; there is also a need to address the conflicting program that occurs at this portion of the site – some of it wants to be back-of-house.
- Guiding landscape principles should be clear and evident – there are many opportunities throughout the campus, and should permeate the whole project (currently, these are evident in the building but have not yet expressed themselves on the site).

Integration of Site & Building:

- The team is strongly encouraged to address different types of learning in innovative ways: tactical spaces, healing spaces, engaging spaces that increase curiosity, mental health, etc. – not just spaces to sit outside, but really well-designed outdoor rooms to engage both the students and faculty / staff.
- Designing learning spaces that adjacent to one another is not enough; as the project moves forward, the building elements should reference each other *and* the landscape, both visually and functionally. The site and full rebuild of this school offer a great opportunity to truly integrate learning and play throughout the site.
- Reasonable and logical organization of the building – seems to make sense from a programmatic point of view and responds to the topography of the site.

- Location of the main entry doesn't feel quite right – students arriving from the west will always be approaching from the rear of the building. The entrance at this location doesn't create an equal experience. Think through the everyday arrival experience of the students; this sequence should feel deliberate, it should be thoughtful and create a positive experience.
- Volumes on either side of the entrance may want to have different language from the main massing; the difference in windows is a start but needs to be reinforced with a difference in material.
- Rethink the main entrance – should not be hidden from view.
- Massing and material study – team mentioned design intent of relating the building to the scale of the neighborhood. It matters less that building height is similar than the actual read of the building massing; this proposal risks emphasizing the large scale of the building despite the fact that it is similar in height to the surrounding context. As the building exterior develops, try to stay away from flat horizontal reading of the façade; use the different massings as a series of smaller volumes coming together. Treating the building in this way can reinforce the metaphor of school being a village where children learn to come together, to collaborate. This approach is also responsive to the variety of activities and uses that embody the school's spaces.
- Explore a rich palette – this project offers an opportunity to look at the school through a fresh lens. The existing massing model is a good start, since it breaks up the various programmatic elements into smaller pieces. Use these smaller pieces as opportunities to introduce a change. For instance, the colab spaces may have different windows and different materials from the bar of classrooms; this will help the colabs to read as their own space from the exterior and break up the massing in a deliberate way. Allow the program to influence the character of the exterior.

Next Steps:

Continue project addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Paul Bradshaw – Grimm + Parker

Kristen Gedeon, Jason Alexander – MK Consulting

Maurice Gaskins – City Schools

Cindi Smith, Paul Crampton, Chang Song, Liam Kraus, Kat Schooley, Billy Arias - Attendees

Messrs. Anthony, Mses. Bradly and Ilieva - UDAAP Panel

Tamara Woods*, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, Carmen Morosan - Planning