

**BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING**

**URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** February 2, 2023

**Meeting #73**

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**Project:** Center West Block J (Poppleton)

**Phase:** Schematic Design

**Location:** 231 N. Schroeder Street, Baltimore

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Pavlina Ilieva recused herself from the Panel before introducing the project and development team. Today is the second presentation of this project to the Urban Design and Architectural Advisory Panel. The first presentation to the Panel was in October 2022. Since the October presentation, the project team has met with the Poppleton Community and Baltimore City DHCD. The meeting yielded a good conversation and exchange of ideas, and the project team worked to respond to comments while continuing to move the urban design goals forward.

The stretch of buildings along this corridor is viewed as an ensemble, with the proposed age-restricted building responding to both the historic context and the newer construction to the south of the site. The proposed building façade includes a mix of textured stone, panel, slat, and brick. The materiality of the new building embraces the materials of the existing context but applies them in a new and different way, rather than attempting to copy or mimic the application.

Updates to the project include:

- Unit count has been slightly reduced to incorporate new unit type.
- The parking counts have also been reduced.
- Loading and second garage entries have been relocated; services have been moved further into the building to make space on the ground floor for residential units.
- The team studied placement and proportion of the courtyards as requested. Moving the courtyards and building segment connecting the north and south wings would greatly limit the use and programming of the building. Because of the age restricted programming, the team opted for spaces that allow for active programming to better serve the residents, meaning that the massing form and location of courtyards will remain similar to the previous iteration.

- The team worked to reinforce the impression that the building was part of the neighborhood, rather than being walled off from the neighborhood, while striving to also maintain privacy for ground floor units.
- Materials, textures, and color tones were studied; there was a focus on balancing transparency and screening.

Richard Jones with iO Studio, the landscape architect for the project, continued the presentation with an explanation of how the landscape components have progressed. The overall goals of the landscape have not changed for the project. Main features of the landscape are:

- Create a rhythm of streetscape that interact with, and reinforces, the language of the architecture.
- Landscape is oriented around the windows and entrances to both shield / soften the urban edge and provide a buffer between the building and the public realm.
- Street trees are paired to create a robust pedestrian buffer despite the narrowness of the sidewalk.
- Trees are planted on the courtyard level as well as the streetscape to create a cohesive outdoor experience at the ground level and above.
- The mews space is intended to be programmed and has a lawn to accommodate activities; the space is curbsless to make it feel continuous and seamless.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

The Panel thanked the project team for their updated presentation and noted that the design process shows discipline and restraint; this restraint gives the project time to develop while not rushing to the next phase of design and allows for thoughtful consideration during the process. The Panel began the discussion with questions before continuing with comments.

#### **Clarifications:**

- *The other (newer construction) buildings organized their courtyards on the east side to capitalize on the views of downtown, but this project focuses on the west. What is the purpose of this team's decision to focus the courtyard on the west side?* The vision is to focus on the PUD as a whole and allow for the building to activate the streetscape and the experience for the whole neighborhood as it fronts the park and the school. There was a lot of discussion about how to connect to the neighborhood. The team felt that the liveliness on N. Schroeder Street could be an asset. Multi-family courtyards are often buried in the site and are not visible; with the proportion of this site, there is an opportunity to connect to the neighborhood on various levels – both at the ground level and above on the second level courtyard. The team wanted this area to feel like an extension of the street level.
- *Context images show the streetscape treatments to the south of the site; is the plan to align this project's streetscape with the existing context? How will this project work to preserve the*

*continuity?* This project will maintain and enhance the scored concrete but modulate it to make it a slightly different experience underfoot. The tree street rhythm will be continuous.

- *The Landscape forms do seem visually consistent. How is the team providing the soil volume needed for the lush landscape pictured?* The team usually provides a depth of 30" and more length of 12' pits which has been proven to be adequate. This approach has been tested and tried in other areas of the city with success. The courtyard tree pits will be determined by the structural loads – dependent on the architects / structural engineers, but the team believes the renders are believable.
- *Does moving the services to Amity Street compromise the access to the elevators?* Regular size trucks will be accommodated, but the space will not be able to accommodate larger trucks. The tradeoff of moving the loading versus having the ground floor units wrap the edge seemed like a good choice.

**Site:**

- Sidewalk adjacent to the entrance and the units is flat which allows for a nice seamless transition. Keep in mind that most projects go through value engineering – team should be mindful of holding onto the sloped sidewalk to ensure that the 4' grade change and seamless continuity is not lost. If this feature is value-engineered out of the project, it will dramatically change how these units experience the transition from inside to the exterior.
- Setback of the private entrances is appreciated and creates a nice buffer.
- The vertical street canvases can become a magnet for graffiti – be mindful of the materiality of this feature. The Panel feels that a lightly screened element will be more successful than something that reads like a storefront.
- Building massing on the site is successful, and the engagement between a building of this size and a tight site is rare. Ground plane, courtyard and balconies all have engagement with the site – the way the team has thought through the experience with the outdoors is successful.
- Trees are appreciated and the consideration of the views from the inside as well as the outside are appreciated.
- Be mindful that the courtyard trees presence and visibility to the street will be determined by their size, which is related to the size of the tree pits.
- Paving creates a human scaled, pleasant pedestrian experience.
- Circulation pattern of the mews is subtle and creates a continuous urban experience while also allowing for a coexistence of the various programs proposed, semi-public uses and needs of units that front onto the space.
- Mews is appreciated; it acknowledges that there is a connection between the two streets. Introduction of the pivot gates is understood. There does not seem to be a place for private conversation – as the space continues to develop, please consider this programming need.

- Small touch, but very important include cultural reference and neighborhood context in the paving patterns. While small, this thoughtful touch lends itself to reinforcing the uniqueness of the community and sets it apart from being “any town, USA”.
- Richness is evolving with the landscape, hardscape, sculpting of the building, elements of the neighborhood, etc.

### **Building:**

- The architecture and landscape help to articulate the importance of the northwest corner of the site as it engages with the park and the neighborhood to the west.
- The selected façade materials help to establish a language along the street level and balance the building in such a way that it addresses the challenges of security and while still offering some openness.
- Can the screen be more delicate to create more (perceived) connection with the public realm? Whether it is a perforated metal or something similar, the Panel has confidence that the design team will provide a fitting solution that is appropriate to the neighborhood.
- Materiality articulates the public from the private – the central piece set back beyond the courtyard seems to utilize the materials that are reserved for the public realm, while the corner at Amity seems to utilize materials that are reserved for the private. The system of thinking about materials is a good start but needs more exploration.
- The various sides of the building are very different and must respond to the site context; the way the materials have been applied is starting to indicate which sides are more public, versus which sides feel more residential and a bit more private.
- Remarkable that all of the sides of the building address the street – there does not seem to be a “back side” of the building.
- Material application is appreciated, but there is a question about the need to use so much of the light-colored fiber cement panel. Consider the east side (facing Poe Homes) – Panel notes that the east façade is rendered to show the full face of the building, but it will never be experienced as a whole. Still, this side needs more study.
- Warmer tones connect to the ground plane and the base does a good job of grounding the building. Levels above the base appear to slide and respond in a nice way, but there is an interruption (see slide 20) where the corner transitions. Something else needs to occur to manage the transition (the hyphen doesn’t quite work). Team may want to explore recessing that portion of the façade or some other method of modulating the mass.
- Decoupling the materials makes sense, but the reading is not yet clear, and needs more study.
- The base needs more work – the mews is very unique; it is outdoors but not adjacent to a street, so it still feels private despite the semi-public nature of the space. The units that front onto the mews can take advantage of the slightly different condition of the site at this side.

**Next Steps:**

Continue the project by addressing the comments above and meet with Planning staff before returning to UDAAP.

**Attending:**

Pavlia Ilieva, Kuo Pao Lian – PI.KL Architects

Eduardo Frontera, Zenairee Garcia – Bonstra Haresign Architects

Dan Bythewood, John Edwards, Ian Arias – Development Team

Richard Jones – Landscape Architect – iO Studio

Brian Baska, David Alcala, Dorothy Page, Ed Gunts, Peter Smith, Kevin Lunch, Ms. Dotie Page, Nicole King, Scott Kashnow, Derek McCorvey, Sonia Eaddy, Tisha Guthrie, Paulette Carroll – Attendees

Osbourne Anthony, Sharon Bradly – UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, Matt DeSantis, Chris Ryer, Jeff La Noue, Kyle Leggs – Planning