**BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING**

**URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** April 11, 2024 **Meeting #90**

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**Project:** Center West Block J (Poppleton) **Phase:** Schematic Design

**Location:** 999 W. Saratoga (previously 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, and the second review was in February 2023. After the initial presentation, the project team met with the Poppleton Community and Baltimore City DHCD and have continued the meetings. The meetings have yielded exchange of ideas, and the project team worked to respond to comments while continuing to move the urban design goals forward.

About the proposed building:

- The building is Block J of the Poppleton Planned Unit Development Phase 1B, located at Schroder and Saratoga, between Poe Homes and Excel High School.
- Unit count has been slightly reduced to 185 dwelling units due to the variety of units.
- Massing:
    - The building form has not changed significantly – there is still a two-story read along the midblock portion of the project.
    - Lobby on North side / Saratoga St. Entry to lobby slightly depressed (1 foot) to get more floor-to-floor height (total of 7 stories).
    - Building will include 2 levels (51 spaces) of structured parking interior to building and wrapped by units.
    - Public program includes the lobby space on the north side, community room on southwest corner, accessible for street and from Mews.
    - Level 3 will have a gym/exercise room and amenity, glazed connections to courtyards.
    - Green roof system will include storm water management features.
- Façade strategy:
    - The materials have been updated to include a more simple, rationale logic.
    - Wood is used at the entries, brick at the base, and the taller volumes are clad in a variety of materials.

    - The team worked to quiet down materiality and paneled look. The building appears to belong to 'family of projects' but not does not attempt to borrow materials / skins from other LaCite sites.
    - The team had a goal to anchor the edge of overall project, which includes multi-family buildings to the south (already constructed).
    - A dark grey base anchors the project on all sides. The primary vertical mass is clad in blue panel above the masonry base. Secondary massing in white. Third volumes brown on courtyards only.
    - Services/garage entry on Amity will be as discrete as possible.
- Materiality:
    - The team is currently looking at terra cotta as a finish material along the base.
    - If the cost is prohibitive, there is a strategy for using the same color in a cementitious material that looks very similar. The main volume would remain with the premium material, even if some of the other cladding needed to change.
    - Primary volume screen terracotta cladding brick course. Using premium material.
    - Secondary massing (white) fiber cement panel. Alternate solutions for cost is fiber cement replacements.
    - Tertiary massing (brown) is aluminum panel.
- Gates:
    - Ground floor entry units around building.
    - The base is articulated with a gateway approach at the ground floor unit entries – the entry areas or "masonettes" provide a layer of transition between the interior and exterior and are protected by steel gates.
    - Units on Amity (masonettes) single story but maintaining 2 story massing on exterior. 2-story masonettes on Schroeder, articulated with steel gates and recesses for private entry and patio, provides a bit more privacy for ground level units.
    - Gates on units use same metal panel/perforated language as mews gates. High enough for security.
    - The gates to the entries and mews will have some unique features, and if something that is more off-the shelf is required due to budgetary concerns, the standard materials will be located at the top of the gate, with the more premium materials at eye level. Gates/steel – tube steel with panels, 3 perforation patterns. Possibly collaboration with local artist.

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. And the team has subtly refined the landscape and focused a lot of energy around the entry points.

- Goals of the Landscaping:
    - Deter unwanted activity. Controlled access. Acknowledging the need for "welcoming" space.
    - Maintaining streetscape rhythm/pattern and view interior to exterior. Knitting soft landscape to hard architecture. Aligning trees with units to soften views to street.

- Plantings – Perennials, grasses, and evergreens.
- Materials – will be simple; textured concrete paving with two different textures: one for walking areas and one for edge of street.
- Refinements at lobby corner and at mews include a ramp at 8% east west down to entry. Stairs north south with pipe rail. Bump outs include landscaping.
- Mews:
    - Primary movement through the mews east-west. Movement in and out of mews-facing masonette movements. Landscape facilities multiple flows. Curved path/planting areas "evoke nature" and follow a riparian pattern.
    - Narrow space – planting selection to survive location/sun.
    - Ginkgo overstory trees – soft separation lattice between unit entries and lawn. Shade tolerant evergreens where less sun.
    - Incorporated seat wall between unit-facing walkway and lawn.
    - Team is working on 'interpretive art installation'.

**DISCUSSION:**

The Panel thanked the project team for their updated presentation and noted the presentation is very thorough and easy to understand. The Panel began the discussion with questions before continuing with comments.

**Clarifications:**

- *Is the project at the maximum height limit and is there a plan for a green roof?* Yes, the building has reached the maximum height and cannot be any taller.

- *What is the intent of the gates?* The gates at the mews are intended to be mostly closed at first while the space begins to be used by the residents. There may be opportunities to open the gates for community events, etc. The alignment (of mews) was intentionally established to align with future plans for the Poe Homes redevelopment, but the design team has no control over that project. The team is interested in setting the project up to be a success.

- *Was there ever a discussion about including a commercial component at the corner?* The team positioned a space at the corner that could function as a retail space, but the proposed use is an amenity space for the residents.

- *Please clarify the materiality.* The wood tone is aluminum, and the building will also include masonry, terra cotta and possibly fiber cement panels but the full scope of the materiality is unknown until after the project has been bid.

- *Where will the maintenance and snow-removal equipment be stored?* The team has not discussed this with the development team. There are some shared maintenance opportunities between this and other buildings, and the team is thankful the question was raised.

**Site:**

- Updated planting on ground plane is more welcoming. Better separated car traffic from front entry. Little entry coves on street level welcome for stoop culture city. Steel panels part of façade and would be a shame to convert to vinyl clad or chain link fencing.
- Mews – seems like it will be popular and enjoyable. Ground plane wayfinding makes sense to all kinds of users. Riparian landscape descriptor makes sense.
- Corner treatment is appreciated and gives additional breathing room to the building; the extra breathing room makes the edge more comfortable.
- Stoop culture of Baltimore will lend activity to the residential entry patio spaces.
- Ground plane treatment all around: Who maintains it? If City needs to cut open sidewalk what happens after to texture/scoring of walkway? Longer term view of the public realm will help the project in the future; consider how agencies do things and what their standard materials are.

**Building:**

- The project is very understandable. Initial choice of the H-shaped building is a smart choice – H floor plan layout makes sense for façade articulation and massing. The building appears as multiple buildings.
- Ground floor units are very much appreciated, and often not included in projects like this, but can be important for activating the site and distributing people around the block.
    - In circumstances like this, ground floor units are typically buffered by landscape, or in other instances, raised up a few feet. This is what drove the question about height.
    - Elevating ground floor units by 2 feet would go a long way for privacy issues and create a real stoop. Maybe even go without screens – this would be appropriate for creating a healthy community feel.
    - It would be preferable if the glazing was not at a level where people walking by can see directly into living rooms, etc.
    - Smaller courtyard – is this space usable as a public/grill space? Should it be private terraces?
- Recessed units give some relief from the street and the screens, but the team needs to consider how people will use this space. Will it function as a place for storage? Will it collect trash?
- The entrance is very tight with regard to the grade change – the landing at the base of the stair in the recessed area could be pulled in a little more so there is more room for negotiation?
    - Consider that people will be bringing bicycles, carts, strollers in through that space.
    - Even if this meets minimum requirements, think about how it will be impacted if it isn't quite enough room. Consider if the glass will be damaged if people are routinely bumping into it as they come and go.
- Concerns about longevity of project as designed – 10+ years in an urban environment, will it stand up?
- The articulation of the façade materials is going to be critical. Try to maintain quality materials, and Material sacrifice – strongly feel project should maintain quality materials and modularity.
- Community beneficial. Hope to see this project inform future development.
- The Panel hopes the project is able to afford the terra cotta finish martial. Fiber cement may work if minimized on ground level but would not be the preferred choice.

Additional Comments from Planning:

- The base massing (dark grey material) turning upwards and bookending the “main volume” confuses the overall massing. The main volume would stand out better if the base was the base and terminated at the main volume. The bookends could be white secondary material to highlight the main volume.
- Schroeder crossing at Mews. Renderings show this as a crosswalk, but site plan review did not. Is this a mid-block crossing and if so, is it safe? Why show a mid-block crossing into a closed gate? This is incongruous with an idealized future with an open gate, which may not happen. If the gates were removed this makes more sense.

**Next Steps:**

Continue the project by addressing the comments above complete Design Review with Planning Staff.

**Attending:**

Pavlia Ilieva, David Alcala – PI.KL Architects
Richard Jones, John Edwards – iO Studio

Councilman John Bullock, Brian Baska, Mona Addison, Nicolle King, Phillip Jones, Ruochen Wang, Sonia Eaddy, Melody Simmons, Ed Gunts, Nen Nisula, Jahmai Nicome, Eduardo Fontera, Trisha Guthrie, Carrie Banizewski – Attendees

Osbourne Anthony*, Sharon Bradly, Kevin Storm – UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard**, Chris Ryer, Caitlin Audette, Antoine Heath, Nick Chupein, Marie McSweeney, Imani Jasper, Matt DeSantis – Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson
** Assigned Planning Staff