

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: October 26, 2023

Meeting #84

Project: Charm TV Headquarters

Phase: Design Development

Location: 2600 block of Pennsylvania Avenue, Black Arts District, Penn North Neighborhood

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Before beginning the presentation, Pavlina Ilieva first recused herself from the Panel and then introduced the development team. PI.KL Architects, BARCO, The Civic Group, and Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC) are members of the development team. Leon Pinkett of BARCO then introduced the project and gave a very brief overview of the rich African American history of the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor, where this project is located. The building is also located within the Black Arts District of West Baltimore, one of the most historically significant places in the country with regard to African American culture and history.

The context includes a mix of uses and building types, including multi-family and rowhouse residential, warehouse / industrial, small retail, and a metro station to the south. Recently there has been increased investment and development in this area, including a vacant lot improvement project, and a new recreation center.

This project aims to hold the corner of Pennsylvania and Clifton Avenue. The community space is located at this corner to provide a public presence and be welcoming to the community and residents as a public space, in addition to its production and office functions. To achieve this the team provided the following design goals:

New charm tv headquarters

- Relocate charm tv facilities to new permanent home.
- Provide space for future expansion of operations and programming initiate collaboration with other government/ community entities.

Community incubator

- Provide space for community-based education, self-expression and creation promote cultural & creative activity in the black arts district.
- Stimulate economic development in the Penn North neighborhood.

Courtney Richeson completed the presentation with a review of the site plan and building massing. The building navigates the site topography with entrances at grade; the community program is also at this grade, with Charm TV program layered above to navigate the higher portion of the site.

The project has been a true collaborative effort and the team thanked Senator Hayes, Mayor Scott and the community for their participation and support.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel consisted of Osborne Anthony, who chaired this session, and Kevin Storm. Sharon Bradley was present for a portion of the presentation but was unable to remain for the full session and supplied written comments in lieu of verbal comments. Mr. Anthony thanked the team for the clear and thorough presentation. The Panel then moved into clarifying questions and comments.

Clarification:

- *How does the team envision Phase 2 of the project?* The team is working with the City on acquisition on the properties for Phase 2, but that piece is currently aspirational only. There is not a clear path for achieving Phase 2, so the team is focused on the piece being presented today. The street shown as parallel to Clifton is envisioned as a pedestrian street with studio storefronts facing onto it – again, this is a hope and not a guarantee. The program was organized with some thoughts about security and public access, which is how the building
- *Does the corner get wider at Clifton and Pennsylvania, and is there an opportunity to make this more pedestrian friendly?* There is a plaza at the corner of Clifton, and a green space. The team will explore opportunities to move the curb line and make the sidewalk larger to ensure this space is more pedestrian friendly, but that was not within the original scope of the project.
- *Is there any story-telling opportunity on that can present itself more visibly on Pennsylvania Avenue? For instance, a pod-cast studio on the more public side of the building?* Yes, the community is able to use and rent the space right off the lobby. There was a lot of interest in access from the community, and those (more public) program elements were included as part of the public zone on Pennsylvania Avenue and toward the corner.
- *What is the grey square on the rendered site plan near the parking lot?* This is the transformer for the building; the team tucked it into the site and BGE is currently ok with this location. The location may change, depending on a number of factors including site plan review and additional comment from BGE.
- *Is the parking required per code or needed as part of the building program?* Yes, to both questions. Note that the proposed parking (8 spaces) does not meet the required minimum required by code and team will be seeking a variance. Site parking was also needed to satisfied program needs. Parking will be designed in such a way that it compliments what is happening on the corner with regard to the programmed spaces (courtyard, community space, etc). Primary access to the community space is not located off the parking lot because of the grade; however, there are secondary entrances to allow circulation all around the building and site.

COMMENTS:

Comments supplied in writing from Sharon Bradley:

- I recommend picking up the streetscape rhythm from surrounding blocks – or, perhaps even more importantly, **creating** one if there is currently no defined streetscape character to provide a model for future development in the area.

- I welcome the playful, whimsical facades, which will enliven the streetscape, create a strong identity for the project and constitute a catalyst for the area.
- Beautiful expression of the Black Arts District – “building as art”.

Site:

- Very thorough context shows that the team took a lot of care and consideration for what was happening in and around the community.
- Possibly opening up one of the sides of the site to have program spilling out is an exciting idea.
- View from the north captures the vitality and the building warehouse shape lends itself to the idea that this is space for making.
- Street trees along Pennsylvania Avenue will be appreciated and the trees should turn the corner on Clifton to provide a continuous and comfortable pedestrian experience.
- Necessary security features are addressed
- Café is not announced directly on the street; opportunity to have this read as more of a public space, invitation to come in and linger. Speaks to the need for the building to signal what portions are public and which are private.
- Messy but flexible use of the parking lot is appreciated. Be sure the transformer doesn't get in the way of those future uses.
- Connections to the greater community, including the Penn North station. Bus stop is close to the front door and will need to be mitigated.
- Take advantage of the curb cut and provide a narrower street and give that portion of the right of way back to pedestrians by making the sidewalk wider. Curb cuts close to the corner are not great for pedestrian access.
- Placement of the transformer should be reconsidered; could lose one additional parking space and screen the transformer with landscaping. This could also serve as an intimate forecourt and navigate access to the building and provide buffer between the street and the building. Additionally, the current location cuts off this site with future proposed green space.
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- Form and typology of the building is a strong statement – engaging. Concern with the gable form and warehouse language of the building. Big warehouses have flat roofs, and there are not many gable forms in this neighborhood.
- The community building and the production building both have the same gabled form, and they are close in scale. Competition occurs with production building and the community building. More tension, difference between the buildings could be an exciting opportunity to draw attention.
- Prefab steel structure limits the roof form.
- Civic and public with modest materials is really responsible and a good use of tax-payer money. The bold color and celebratory nature of the lighting is appropriate for the program. Note that some of what is being suggested may increase the budget and alternatives may need to be studied as the design progresses.
- Balancing act but there is an opportunity to celebrate the media piece more. Team should explore opportunity for live broadcast, animated space; community production spaces to be more visible and celebrated.

Building:

- The project

Next Steps:

Continue working with Planning staff to address the Panel's comments.

Attending:

Chris Mfume, Grant Ringleman – The Civic Group

Brennan Murray, Colin Tarbert – BDC

Leon Pinkett – BARCO

Pavlina Ilieva, Courtney Richeson – PI.KL

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal

Hallie Miller – Baltimore Banner

Patrick McMahon – Baltimore City MTA

Brandon Fritz, Greg Lawson - Attendees

Mr. Anthony*, Mr. Storm, Ms. Bradley – UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard**, Caitlin Audette, Chris Ryer, Matt DeSantis, – Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff