

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

Date: November 16, 2023

Meeting #85

Project: Harborplace

Phase: Master Plan

Location: Inner Harbor

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Planning Director Chris Ryer began the meeting with a presentation for the public, sharing information about the development review process that the project must go through. Pavlina Ilieva, the UDAAP chair, introduced the panel and set the parameters for the review.

David Bramble then began the presentation with a background on the process of how the team arrived this point in the master-planning process, including sharing the team’s public engagement. A series of goals were set for the project based on what the team heard from their interactions with the public.

Kim Nielsen with 3XN, a design firm in Copenhagen, introduced himself and provided background on his firm and their experience working on sustainable harbors.

Vaki Mawema with Gensler then began the presentation for the master plan, grounding the proposal within the existing conditions and sharing various concepts considered by the team before sharing how the proposed and existing plans compare in their connection to the surrounding context. Details of the proposed upper and lower promenades were shared along with information about each of the five (5) proposed buildings. The team ended the presentation with a review of the proposed improvements to the right-of-way along Pratt Street, Light Street, and Conway Street which include the reduction of vehicular traffic lanes and two-way traffic of the proposed Red Line as a light rail.

DISCUSSION:

Pavlina Ilieva, the Chair of the Panel, thanked the team for their presentation and shared the panels excitement for this transformative project. Chair Ilieva noted the difficult task that the team has in designing such a unique and beloved place. The panel stated a shared goal of offering feedback to help the project succeed.

Overarching Concerns

- It is acceptable (and even critical) to create marketing images for a project in order to communicate a vision and generate excitement. It is clear that much of what is being shown today is for marketing purposes. However, for the purpose of the UDAAP design review, the team must take the time to analyze, study, debate, and allow for an iterative design process to occur. Design is a non-linear process, and the Panel highly recommends the team take a step

back at this early stage of the design and ground the project in thoughtful analysis and demonstrate design strategies that account for all local site conditions.

- Public outreach only began in June of 2023, and now, suddenly there appears to be fully designed plans with buildings, parks, new street, etc.
- There is an extraordinary jump between very basic concepts and analysis to a fully realized design for buildings and environments fueled by preconceived notions.
- The presentation paints a complete picture of a project that could be implemented if there were no parameters. It was very exciting when the unveil came, but also a little bit surprising because of the amount of development and resolution that has gone into the buildings, even at this very early stage, with very basic site planning.
- Some of the ideas shown today are very potentially complicated, complex, and potentially expensive. The Panel expects these interventions to be taken step by step, so there will obviously be revisions shaped by the realities of the project.
- Today, the presentation should be focused on the big ideas and how those came into shape. The presentation is not yet clear on how this proposal came to be – either the team has been working longer failed to show the work, or the design over-simplifies the complexity of the design problem.
- The previous buildings and plan were successful because there was a big idea that was unique and ground-breaking for its time. The question now is are you trying to create something exciting and new? Or are you catching up to other waterfronts? Identifying this will help set the goal of the development.
 - The success of this project will hinge on the vision – the big ideas.
 - As the project evolves and goes through different hurdles, known and unknown, it will need to return to the big clear vision that sets the parameters against which all decisions are made.
 - The team must keep going back to the big ideas, to ensure the success of what happens here - in whatever form and fashion. It is guaranteed to evolve, but the vision of Harborplace will become diluted if it is not baked into each and every decision.
- Everyone knows the story of the previous iteration that was inviting a lot of residents. It was just so exciting – the Rouse team proclaimed “cities are fun” and offered a festival marketplace experience that was very welcoming but didn’t stand the test of time. The question to ask today is “are cities still fun?”
- For this team, is the goal about bringing density and housing? It's important to establish the high-level ideas that you can keep going back to that will ensure the success of the project. Is this a big idea?
- The team needs to dive into the idea of this being for Baltimore and of Baltimore.
 - The idea of Harborplace being for Baltimore, by Baltimore is a strong vision, but it has not yet been registered, ingrained, in the design. Consider what local *really* means.
 - What has changed since the initial success of Harborplace?
 - What made it feel like it's no longer for Baltimore?
 - That research and analysis needs to find its way into the project. Local businesses are just one part of this, what else makes the harbor part of the identity of the city?
- The presentation doesn’t show that the process has been truly robust.
 - The presentation is missing the connection between the past and what is there (at Harborplace) today.
 - The vision shared today is very polished, and it seems to be missing the grittiness that is such a part of Baltimore.

- If the team decided that the grittiness doesn't belong at Harborplace, what informed that decision?
- The current design is a buffet of ideas: building shapes, plans, uses. But the current proposal is missing a framework – the team needs to identify design principles to organize the site. A step back in the design process will allow the team to identify what is at the heart of the project.
- Outreach and collecting comments from the community are great places to start, but there needs to be a bridge between those discussions (with community) and how the input shaped the design. It would be very helpful to understand how the team drew lines from the public input to the master plan. Why and how certain choices were made, based on public input, must be shown clearly in the design.
- On the surface the project appears fully developed and complete, but when the layers are stripped away, it becomes clear the ideas behind the plan are very basic and haven't been analyzed enough or vetted thoroughly.
 - There needs to be a fundamental analysis on the site as it stands, as it was, and as it will be in the future.
 - Master plan review needs to include a much deeper level of analysis and research than what has been provided with this presentation.
 - There must be a design framework, a set of design principles, that help generate the master plan. The entire plan cannot ride on a diagram of five red arrows piercing through the site as a symbol of connectivity. This site is much more complex than extending the existing street grid to the water.
- Equity is the current buzzword, but it isn't yet fully integrated into the design. There needs to be more than just porosity of the ground plane. Simply making the site more visible doesn't guarantee equity. How can everyone feel welcome and connected? How can this design address equity as more than just a buzzword by integrating it in a meaningful way?
- Designers and developers recognize the potential of unintended consequences that occur with developments and the decisions that are made during the design process.
 - Unintended consequences can be averted by taking smaller steps and examining each choice made along the way.
 - Clearly identify the team, and each of the team members' roles – how is everyone working together?
 - It is important to show how each team member's own work provides lessons which can inform this project and add to its success.
 - What has each team member encountered previously that can be utilized at this site?
 - Just because someone can walk here or there, through that building versus another, does not really guaranteeing an equitable environment or inequitable building.
- Is there a way to conceive of the project that will allow the space to continue to evolve? How can phasing respect resiliency aspects? Is filling up the site with buildings a good idea if that is no longer appropriate in 10 or even 20 years? Should space be left behind for future development and unknown circumstances?
- The team will need to be flexible to allow the ideas to evolve.
- The proposal contains some wonderful strategies, that need to evolve past this early idea stage:
 - Fundamental ideas that were part of earlier plans as Director Ryer pointed out, such as closing the Light Street spur.

- The trees are very appreciated – shade would be amazing in this space, to relieve some of the hotness during the summer.

More Detailed Questions/Requests

- The presentation is missing real studies pertaining to movement, view corridors and access across the site. This needs to be studied with regard to all of the complexity of the site, including the change in topography, viewsheds, etc.
- The team needs to envision the project as a living organism that is experienced from different perspectives, at different times of the day, at different times of the year, from different locations. How does it change and respond to the different access points?
- The team needs to clearly share what the program is, and why specific programmatic elements have been located where they are.
 - What if the buildings were located closer to the streets?
 - Can some of the buildings be removed or combined to free up more space on the ground?
 - As it stands the site looks overbuilt. There's no denying that there needs to be activity and program, but the Panel is questioning the how the team arrived at this proposed arrangement.
- There needs to be a series of drawings that clearly illustrate private and public space.
- Program is always important; without having viable and sound program no design can move forward – there would be no way to evaluate the success or failure of a design without program.
- It is a challenge to review the Harborplace proposal being presented today because the program is not clear.
 - The water edge and surrounding streets are visible, but is the main program a park, commercial, retail, or residential?
 - What is the predominant element? Even if all those things exist, there should be a hierarchy that can be clearly explained and rationalized.
 - There is also not enough hierarchy with the adjacent program (Rash Field, Maryland Science Center, Aquarium). Moving forward, it is expected that the team will study the project site in connection to the rest of the Inner Harbor promenade.
- There's a lot of ambiguity as well, about how much and what is privately funded or publicly funded? How does that impact the design? It's important to understand the magnitude of the project, and not end up with a watered-down version of what has been shared.
- To properly evaluate the proposal we need to understand the thinking behind it.
 - What are those basic building blocks?
 - What are the spatial relationships?
 - What are the circulation patterns?
 - How do all these elements respond to one another?
 - How are you transitioning into the urban grid from your site?
 - What happens at the edges and are the choices being made based on the existing plans?
 - How is your masterplan growing out of the existing plans?
 - If this plan departs from the existing accepted and adopted plans, then the team needs to explain why.

- The presentation mentioned a net gain in public space – but this needs to be clearly illustrated. Where does it occur and what form does it take? Is it a park or promenade? It isn't clear what is public and private, and what is new versus existing.
- Honoring the history of the space is a commendable idea, but there needs to be more understanding about how the history is honored in a meaningful way.
- What is the phasing? If it's not happening all at once, how do the new elements work with remaining elements? How does that overlay work with changes to the streets and other infrastructure? Are there interim uses or paths planned for the years of construction?
- ADA accessibility was referenced throughout the presentation, but the plans do not clearly illustrate how accessible paths will be provided. For example, the ramp to the lower promenade appears to need at least 36' of ramp. How is that achieved and how accessible will it feel for all users?
- Much of the character depends on a significant tree canopy, which will need a significant amount of soil volume, how is this being accommodated? Additionally, the trees will need to withstand brackish water. What is rendered is pretty, but what things might prevent a heavily planted edge from becoming a reality on this site?
- Intensive green roofs are being shown on the building, but how feasible is that aspiration? These can be challenging to install and keep up.
- Can the plan be accessible?
 - How will it welcome everyone, despite different mobility needs? How will people get to the different levels, especially considering that the team is proposing a raised promenade for flood resilience?
 - The upper promenade - what happens at the existing elevation and how is the transition between elevations being handled?
 - Even some simple sections drawing from these new moves and the existing conditions would be extremely helpful for understanding how the team is navigating these potentially challenging moments on the site.

Streetscape/Urban Context

- The extents of the project are ambiguous, especially along Light Street:
 - What are the extents of *this* project – where does it begin and end?
 - Are you introducing another park along Light Street?
 - How is the space going to be used in a meaningful way – will it be programmed?
 - These are questions that have not been answered. The images shown are high level views, but there has not been enough substance included to understand what is actually being proposed.
- How do the streets to the north intersect with the project?
 - The team has not shared what happens at these key nodes.
 - Are they being maintained as entry points? Will they be redesigned?
 - How does that edge interact with the development?
- The team needs to pay more attention to the Pratt Street, not the changes to the street, but the edge of the development. How do you increase the porosity while also engaging the street in a more deliberate way? Despite your intentions it still feels like the development has turned its back to the street.

- Similarly, how does the project interact with Conway?
 - Following an Orioles or Ravens game how does this intersection welcome visitors from Conway?
 - How does it terminate at the Harbor?
 - Consider the peak demand on game days. The harbor must address the arrival moment for pedestrians coming from the Conway Street corridor.
- The viewshed slide shows a simple series of arrows, but the following questions need to be addressed:
 - What is the urban context beyond that?
 - What is the pedestrian experience?
 - What does the space directly adjacent to the wow moments feel like?
 - What is the scale in these spaces and how do pedestrians feel?
 - These questions must be studied in diagrams and in section to get a better understanding of how certain decisions will impact Downtown.
- Traffic patterns – the proposed change at Light and Pratt Streets could work but needs to be done very well. Removing the right turn spur that cuts off McKeldin Plaza from the water is a very big move, but the project and buildings do not yet have a meaningful relationship to this change.
- Regarding the proposed changes to Light Street and Pratt Street, do these follow any network or multi-modal master plans? How are the changes integrated into the larger urban context? Where are the nodes that are impacted by the proposed changes, and how are the links between the harbor and the city happening?
- The proposed changes will have far-reaching impacts all across Downtown, not just at the immediately adjacent intersections. The team must coordinate the proposed changes and look at ripple effect.

Building Forms and Connections

- There needs to be a much more rigorous investigation of the possibilities with regard to the massing and placement of buildings. There's absolutely no telling why the 2 towers are positioned where they are on Light Street, why they are on one side and not the other.
- The team is encouraged to challenge the morphology around the forms as they develop – provide more analysis on how these forms evolved from the initial concept and why specific locations were chosen over others.
- The proposed buildings could be placed anywhere in the world; what about this site in Baltimore's Inner Harbor has shaped the buildings?
- The team shared that the design process was set by the water's edge cascading and shaping the architecture down. It seems arbitrary – it appears that the team tried some things and then decided that is was good enough.
- The Panel would like to see a more intellectually rigorous approach to this project to really understand whether what is proposed simply taken for granted or if it will really work when tested. Wouldn't it be better to understand now if there are fundamental flaws in the design at this early stage versus later when the process is further along and more difficult to change?

- This team knows that keeping the existing pavilion buildings and applying a coat of fresh paint, and perhaps a few different surfaces here and there; switching out some of the vendors is not going to push the reset button on Harborplace.
 - The Panel agrees that bigger thinking is necessary, and the project needs more porosity through the pavilions. The streets need to be straightened out, the promenade needs to be improved, etc.
 - A lot of the things proposed today are long overdue. And there may be some good design moves and attractive ideas about the architecture here, but they have not been tested.
- Pratt Street buildings:
 - On the Pratt Street side where the other 2 buildings are proposed, the team shared an idea of dipping the line into that middle site. The diagram is a view from across the harbor with a curved line dipping in the middle, but the view is completely arbitrary. How did the team select this location? What does the diagram actually tell us about the massing and what shaped it?
 - The two buildings on Pratt bifurcate the view. The current pavilion does turn its back on Pratt Street and cut off the view from South Street to the Harbor. What is proposed still feels like a very solid edge, which now starts to become even closer to Pratt. The footprint is so deep that the building seems to push both on the Pratt Street edge and on the promenade edge.
 - It can be argued the sail building form contradicts the aquarium. Will it dilute the power of that building or speak to it?
 - Look at the strong diagonal that is set up by the National Aquarium and reinforced with the pedestrian bridges; consider the impact of introducing new object buildings not just to the immediate site, but to surrounding context as well.
 - Additionally, the sail building is intended to show a view of the water, however, it is oriented toward the towers, not the water.
 - There are serious concerns that the two buildings along Pratt Street are too large in their footprints (wide), complete studies that show what is appropriate in this location.
 - This space may feel pinched, but it needs to be studied in a digital model.
- Light Street buildings:
 - Panel questions whether the towers belong on this side of the site – is it more appropriate to move these to the Pratt Street side?
 - Massing studies do not fully explain why the towers are located where they are proposed to be. The team needs to study the relationships of the buildings to context – the proportions feel arbitrary instead of deliberate.
- The team must complete more studies prior to returning to UDAAP:
 - Work closely with the Planning Department to understand what drawings are needed for the project to advance. There is a lot of work left to do and the team must keep an open mind as the design progresses.
 - Members of this team have worked on Master Plans prior to this and should know the types of drawings and specific information that go into this phase of a project. If there is confusion, please refer to other Master Plan examples and contact the Planning Department to help clarify what is required.

- Drawings for the next presentation should enable a substantive design conversation and allow for a discussion what will or will not work based on the constraints, challenges and opportunities of the site, program, context, and design intent.
- Study the impacts of the changes to streetscape around the site at a diagrammatic level.
- Use sections through the site and building to study viewshed and new spaces created by the proposed buildings.
- Use sections to study grade changes at key moments in the site.
- Address the experiences of the site in a digital model, with the cameras at the ground level, with the trees in place. Viewing the building massing and the resulting space will help modulate the architecture as it develops. If the team feels the building is in the wrong place, then it can be shifted. If not, then show the Panel why it is properly located. Either way, it needs to be studied for that conversation to happen.
- Based on studies of the building form, the environments and public space will shift again and need to be solved. There is quite a bit of work left ahead for this project.
- Team is encouraged to be flexible as the process continues – there will be more input from the public and having an open mind will result in a more appropriate and sensitive design that can stand the test of time.

Next Steps:

Work with Planning staff to respond to UDAAP comments prior to returning to UDAAP for a second review. It is anticipated the Master Plan will require a minimum of three (3) reviews, and each subsequent development project, whether for building or public space, is required to complete its own Development Review process.

Attending:

David Bramble, Adam Genn, Leland Shelton - MCB Real Estate Team
 Clair Agre – Unknown Studio
 Kim Nielsen – 3XN Architects
 Vaki Mawema – Gensler
 Bryce Turner, Ryan Janes, Chris Holler – BCT Architects

Addison Palmer, Al Barry, Betsy Clark, Bill Wells, Brandon Nickoles, Catherine Joseph, Charles Place, David Benn, Ed Gunts, Fred Shoken, Giacomo Bologna, Isaac Leal, Jack Sullivan, Jeff La Noue, Jens Holm, Jonathan Sandoval, Julian Frost, Kara Trimpin, Marvin James, Michael Saxon, Melody Simmons, Nicole Cunningham, Peter Fillat, Peter Smith, Phyllis Fung,

Laurie Schwartz – Waterfront Partnership

Deputy Mayor Justin Williams, Liz Koontz, J.D. Merrill, Maribel Cervantes – Baltimore City / Community and Economic Development

Anthony Osbourne, Sharon Bradley and Pavlina Ilieva* — UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette**, Chris Ryer, Eric Tiso, Nicholas Chupein, Matt Desantis, Ava Richardson,
Amy Gilder-Busatti, Jo Birch – Department of Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff