

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

Date: August 24, 2023

Meeting #81

Project: 50 W. Oliver

Phase: Schematic II

Location: Mount Vernon

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Yonah Zahler, the developer and CEO of Zahlco re-introduced the project and how the team has been working diligently to address the panels comments.

Scot Foster with BCT then introduced the rest of the design team including the landscape architect Ryan Cosgrove. The focus of the presentation will be the Phase 1 building and how it sits on the site. The project will include 3500 sq. ft. of retail and 270 residential units. The team will review what was previously presented as well as the comments they received from UDAAP and then present the updated proposal.

Ryan Cosgrove, the landscape architect with Kimley Horn, then shared the landscape design moves that are being made at the site including the two plaza entries and the corner at Oliver and Maryland.

Ryan Janes with BCT continued the presentation with a closer look at the proposed architecture explaining how it responds to the comments from the panel, and how the design has evolved in general. The response includes the extension of the existing structural members, and an erosion of the massing to expose the retain building. Additionally, a united color palette and uses connect the various aspects of the initial phase of design.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the thorough presentation and expressed appreciation for the significant improvements along both street edges. The Panel then moved into clarifying questions and comments.

Clarification:

- *Universal access is achieved through the universal lobby's at both streets, however, for the retail there is only ADA access along Maryland? No, there is also access from Oliver next to the lobby.*
- *Should the parking lane along Maryland Ave be along the side of the building? The project only takes a parking lane from the current street configuration.*
- *Façade A and Façade B are not the same material – but are the same color. Is that accurate? Yes, we are choosing to maintain a similar palette for the upper levels, so that the base of the building is the focus.*

- *I'd like to understand the universal access along Oliver a little better, where does one actually enter? Is there a ramp connected to the corner stairs? No, there's isn't. We did look at a ramp closer to the intersection – but it used all the space and created a barrier. The ramp is east of the lobby entrance and provides access to the interior of the main retail space.*

COMMENTS:

Site:

- Really appreciate that way you're handling the various corners of the site – the ideas that you've brought to the project looking at the corners as special nodes, I can see pedestrians arriving at this area and really standing back, looking around, and feeling a sense of destination and belonging.
- Very creative to use amphitheater seating and planting at the corner of Oliver and Maryland.
- The dual set of spaces that you've created could work well, a lively streetscape and upper level that's slightly removed has the potential to be an exciting addition to the streetscape.
- At the north end, consider how the plaza feels in connection to the Maryland Avenue bridge, what does that look like when you're inhabiting the plaza? How can you frame the view? Or do you need to screen part of that view? The pedestrian experience in the plaza will need to be carefully considered.
- Consider echoing the art found at the north plaza at the Oliver plaza, this is a great way to really center the design and a placemaking opportunity.
- The plant palette works well, however, suggest you reconsider the lawn adjacent to the Oliver St entrance – this will be hard to maintain and could be something to bring more life to the space.
- The building is now activated on many sides and is more desirable in general.
- The plaza at the corner is the area that needs the most resolution, it needs ADA access – consider replicating the entrance sequence on Maryland along Oliver, which maintains the vocabulary of the building.
- If the plaza isn't the main entry to the market, then you will need to make it clear where people should go to enter the main floor of the building.
- Consider if the plaza should be so focused on the corner? Is that addressing the vehicular ramp off 83 too much? Or could it slide north along Maryland or more west along Oliver? Maybe the area is a planting terrace?
- Where does drop off happen for rideshare or deliveries? Consider how this will impact the design? Could the drive shared with the Fitzgerald include a parking lane for this type of dropoff?

Building:

- It's interesting how you're paying attention to the adaptive reuse of the building, the rigor placed on the team by the structure is showing and beginning to work really well.
- It's exciting how you're utilizing the grade to your advantage and skillfully organizing the building, and organizing the pedestrian connections elevated from the sidewalk.
- It's successful along the street level, but then also continues into the depths of the building. There's a clear network of circulation that will tie the project together. You're tying what's happening within the building, with the potential of what can happen outside the building as well.

- You've organized the façade elements in a methodical way, but I'm still concerned that the facades facing the Fitzgerald and that facing Penn Station are the same. The jewel box buildings you've referenced look one way from a distance and up close they are articulated in unique ways. Are there subtleties that you can begin to explore that can bring a unique quality to the architecture when you're up close to it?
- You're beginning to articulate the fenestration differently along the side of the Fitzgerald, how does the façade punch into the façade in the same way along the JFX, should this be differentiated or specialized.
- Appreciate the erosion of the façade and the materiality along Oliver and Maryland.
- I think the use of the word iconic puts too much pressure on the project, I wonder if by turning down the rhetoric the project might feel more comfortable— encourage you to look at it from a different lens which will allow you to make refinements that will let the project succeed. A few examples include the angle at the roofline at the corner of Oliver and Maryland that appears overdone – only make these moves if they fulfill the goals that you set initially. Don't want the building to read like it's trying too hard. Allows you to focus on making the façade elegant on its own.
- At the corners consider what is being forced onto the project and pull back, reconsider what is needed for it to be identifiable and memorable rather than just stand out.
- From the highway the perched massing makes sense, is this same language working at other locations along the street?
- Appreciate the restraint at the white facades, you're creating a clear language in the elevation that works well.
- Establish the vertical ribbon window elements and they can be two story or four-story along different elevations, if you change to punched openings maintain the proportions so that they remain in the same language as the other windows.
- Ground plane is the most successful aspect of the project – make the design language here the iconic aspect of the design.
- The Oliver residential entry needs more refining, seems too solid and heavy, maybe it becomes more open so it is lighter and more welcoming, how can it feel more connected to the rest of the base of the building. Is the private residential entry more prominent than the public commercial entry next to it?

Next Steps:

Continue working with Planning staff to address the panels comments.

Attending:

Yonah Zahler – Zahlco Development LLC

Scot Foster, Bryce Turner, Ryan Janes, Rajesh Gulati – BCT Architects

Al Barry – ABA Consulting

Barbara Aughenbaugh – University of Baltimore

Pavlina Illieva*, Anthony Osbourne, Sharon Bradley - UDAAP Panel

Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette**, Chris Ryer - Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff