

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

Date: August 3, 2023

Meeting #80

Project: B&O Railroad Museum – South Car Shop Renovation / Campus Plan

Phase: Schematic

Location:

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Kris Hoellen, Executive Director of the B&O Railroad Museum, introduced the project and noted the South Car Shop is the longest continually running railroad repair shop in the United States, and possibly the world. The shop was in use from 1869 to 1990 and the Museum wants to restore the building in time for the 200-year anniversary of its construction. The restoration offers an opportunity to integrate the car shop into the museum program and provide a new entrance on the south side of the campus, which will reorganize the sequence of the museum.

Scott Vieth of Design Collective continued the presentation with an overview of the broader neighborhood context. The museum entrance is currently located at the north edge of the campus on Pratt Street, and the new configuration will reorient the entrance to the south of the museum campus. The new entrance and public-facing plaza have the opportunity to connect the neighborhoods of Hollins Market and Pigtown along Arlington Avenue, which curves around the western edge of the museum campus.

The presentation included historic context and images showing how the campus has evolved over time from a working railroad site to a museum, and finally, to a more modern museum experience that relates better to the neighborhood. The team ended the presentation with a broad overview of the Campus Master Plan, which is not under review in this presentation, but was included for context purposes. Today's review is intended for the initial phase of the development, which is limited to the South Car Shop and the entry plaza.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the very clear and thorough presentation. The Panel then moved into clarifying questions and comments.

Clarification:

- *The parking lot is still in the same place and the entry sequence is largely the same; did the team study any other options than the configuration shown today?* The new plaza opens up the site to the neighborhood, and a big goal for the B&O Museum was to remove the retaining wall that felt a bit like a barrier between the campus and the Pigtown Neighborhood. The team did look

at other configurations, but the main goal of removing the retaining wall was a driving force in all of the designs.

- *How does the bus drop off work?* The team anticipates that the busses will pull into the plaza area from Ramsay Street and loop around, making a right turn on Ramsay and another right on Arlington. The busses will park in the lot to the west. There will also be a lay-by space for high volume days. The team is still working through the logistical challenges of the bus drop-off.
- *What happens to the existing entrance?* There will be signage directing people to the new entrance.
- *What is meant by “active” museum – are the trains active?* Yes, there is a one-mile-long train ride that is part of the museum program. This active section of rail line is owned by the museum and runs off to the southwest. The schedule is not regular, train runs sporadically.

COMMENTS:

Site:

- Interesting project and program. In the future, include additional studies for context. These are helpful to see what the team studied and what elements or massing approaches worked on the site.
- Museums are very important to the communities in which they are located, and the Panel compliments the goals the B&O is trying to accomplish. This review is an opportunity for the team to receive a fresh evaluation of the proposal.
- The intent makes sense, but the execution needs a little more study. Their current front entry is a parking lot, with a non-descript moment of arrival. The moment of arrival at the museum is not clear. Team should be careful to not replicate the experience at a grander scale.
- Sequence through the campus and reorganization of the front entrance:
 - Reorienting the museum to front the neighborhood (rather than turning its back) is an important point.
 - The arrival sequence needs to be cleaned up and more thought should be given to the former main entrance to ensure that Pratt Street does not become a walled off dead zone to the neighborhood to the north.
 - Panel understands the challenges, and agrees generally with the approach that the museum entry changing to the opposite side is a very valid thing to study.
 - The purpose of restructuring the sequence through the museum is clear with the pinnacle of the visit ending in the Roundhouse but be careful to focus on the building as a 360-degree experience. Make sure that Pratt Street doesn't become the back door.
 - A traditional museum sequence is enclosed within a building; because of the nature of this museum, an outdoor experience is also required, thus the sequence of movement through the campus is clearly very important.
 - The roundhouse is an important focal point and should be visible from key points in the sequence through the outdoor program. Patrons should not lose sight of the Round House; the entry position from below has the potential to be disorienting since the Round House will be out of view.
 - Procession can begin either at the lower or upper level and should be a promenade that connects to the museum, through the campus, all while highlighting the “crown jewel” – roundhouse - of the museum.
- Parking lot and plaza areas as part of the overall museum sequence.

- Parking lot:
 - The parking lot is the first experience of the project – arrival sequence needs to begin in the lot. Having a clear sense of arrival will benefit the overall museum experience.
 - Despite the fact there will be a lot of different types of parking accommodated, the parking lot needs to be a part of the experience. Since many people will arrive via motor vehicle, the parking lot must be part of the arrival sequence in order for it to feel inclusive.
 - The parking lot is an opportunity for stormwater management, tree canopy, etc. This can be pleasant, safe and create a sustainable narrative.
 - Parking lot, drop off – a bit circuitous. Needs to be legibility about the arrival – not just “some other part of the museum over there” – if the effort of excavation is critical to the project, then it needs to enhance the entire experience.
- Plaza Area:
 - Excavation doesn’t need to be so extreme – the plaza could become more of an arrival court that would act as a queuing area. The excavation is only marginally better to what is currently there from an arrival sequence perspective. A very solid edge still seems to exist, and the moment of arrival is made ambiguous by the meandering arrival sequence.
 - During large events, the busses will pose a challenge to the programming of the plaza space.
 - Busses should not have a place in the plaza. There is an opportunity to have a bus drop on Ramsay Street rather than inside the plaza.
 - The drop-off mechanics should happen in a space that is separate from the space for people – make an effort to prioritize the pedestrian space.
 - The excavated plaza is a big move but does not yet achieve the intended experience.
 - Study the public plaza and programming; rethink the overall arrival sequence.
 - Panel agrees that the opening up of the edge to the neighborhood is helpful, but it may not need to be such an extreme proposal as what is being proposed.
- Overall site:
 - Outdoor learning can be passive; can be observational just based on the design of the space.
 - Some sort of context connection needs to happen in the areas that reflect the history of the train yard – create an authentic experience, which is to say that there is an opportunity to embrace some of the not-so-polished history of rail yards.

Building:

- The purpose of the tunnel would be interesting to understand – this is a great space; it would be interesting to keep this feature or a portion of it if possible.
- Look at moving the entrance closer to the street; having the entrance slide over to the south will signal that this is an urban museum.
- Upper area near the flex building and the wall along Pratt Street – team should explore opportunities to improve the openness and porosity / activity along Pratt Street. Consider how the pieces of program can daylight on the Pratt Street edge.

Next Steps:

Continue addressing the comments above and work with Department of Planning staff on next steps. Please also verify that the design meets MHT requirements.

- MHT Mapping - <https://mht.maryland.gov/secure/medusa/mapintermediate.aspx?ID=396&ID1=396&ID2=undefined&Section=presEase&PropertyID=44927&selRec=presEase>
- MHT Easement Link - <https://mht.maryland.gov/secure/medusa/mapintermediate.aspx?ID=396&ID1=396&ID2=undefined&Section=presEase&PropertyID=44927&selRec=presEase>
- Easement Information - https://mht.maryland.gov/easement_existing.shtml

Attending:

Kris Hoellen, Peter Vasco – B&O Railroad Museum

Michael Pullano, Michael Summers, Scott Veith, Robin Rodowski, Dayanara Padilla – Design Collective

Matt Thomasson – RK&K

Kim Lane – Pigtown Main Street

Morgan Simpson – Attendees

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

Ren Southard**, Caitlin Audette, Nick Chupein - Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff