

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

Date: October 5, 2023

Meeting #83

Project: The Compass

Phase: Master Plan

Location: Block bounded by N. Howard, W. Fayette, N. Park, and W. Lexington Street

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Planning staff and Pavlina Ilieva introduced the project, explaining that it is coming to UDAAP prior to moving to CHAP for design review and approval.

Chris Janian with Westside Partners introduced the team and the project, and detailed the outreach that has been completed to date that create the program. Davin Hong with Hanbury then began the presentation with a summary of the program and an overview of the surrounding context. Davin continued by sharing several preliminary massings that the team considered including a connected midrise, a disconnected midrise, and two towers. Ultimately, the team chose a single tower on the south block, and a midrise at the north block set within the existing buildings.

Pavlina then asked the team to explain why specific programs were located throughout the site. Chris Janian described the program as responsive to the surroundings and sited to address significant corridors. Chuck Patterson with SM+P architects added that the historic buildings played a part, as they considered which uses would be best suited to each building.

The team also intends to enhance and activate the streetscape surrounding the block and add to this with the use of outdoor terraces that traverse the block.

The architecture for the new tower is intended to be contemporary, but compatible with the surrounding historic buildings. It is important to the team that the new construction elements fit into the unique character of the Five and Dime Historic District. The team will also use contemporary design at the midrise building, with a goal of simple and elegant architecture.

DISCUSSION:

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

Clarification:

- *In terms of the historic boundary, does it encompass both blocks? Yes, it encompasses the entire site.*
- *In terms of Zoning and bulk, you described everything east of Park Ave as being high rise and to the west as midrise. Does the Zoning maintain this? The Zoning is the same across the entire site.*

- *There seems to be a lot of parking, have you considered three stories of parking below ground taking advantage of the change in topography over the site?* Our parking studies have identified a need for the parking proposed. We have considered additional below ground parking, however, the increase in costs is prohibitive once it goes deeper. The current proposal does take advantage of the topography.
- *Have you looked at the deeper surrounding context, especially as you consider the streetscape?* Yes, we see Fayette and Lexington as key pedestrian corridors, we are maintaining the paving and street tree rhythm that runs along Howard Street.
- *What is the current character of Marion Street? How do people use it, how is that changing? What is the impact to current patterns?* It's not currently being utilized for either vehicular or pedestrian activity, as none of the buildings are occupied. The intent historically and in the future is as a service location. It doesn't connect to the other streets, and doesn't appear to be a common vehicular cut through. We do see the ends of Marion Street as contributing to the public realm. Rather than making the buildings blank facades along Marion Street we are interested in maintaining the buildings around the corner and perhaps the paving treatment.

COMMENTS:

We applaud the goal of the project and believe the revitalization of this site will help connect the dots of the ongoing revival of downtown.

Site:

- Baltimore has an interconnectivity, and this site is at the heart of that. This building can be a catalyst to reinvigorate this area of the Westside.
- Encourage you to hire a landscape architect as soon as possible. They need to be an integral part of the team to integrate landscape and streetscape into the design.
- Important to understand that once this is completed, no one will ever understand the entire site as a single project. People will experience one aspect of the design at a time. Each building needs to be able to function and read individually as well as part of the larger context.
- How do you ground the project and make the project successful? Beyond the historic buildings the team needs to find the heart of the project— where is the there? How does one know they've arrived at this destination? Where are the opportunities in this project to make it truly transformative? Because it is such a large and major project in such an important location this is critical. The design isn't there yet – need to move to the next step of how to create a significant project.
- What is the identity of The Compass? Where does it happen? What would the moment that you know that you've arrive? Doesn't have to be singular, can be a series of moments. There needs to be more analysis of the ground level and how this project reacts, responds, and receives.
- Consider Marion Street and how the street is lit, paved, and continue the design of the streetscape into the space.
- Is there an opportunity, particularly on Howard Street, to raise the sidewalk connection at Marion Street, to make Howard Street a truly pedestrian friendly area. The paving can then extend deeper within Marian, so the only truly back of house space are the loading areas. The green space along Fayette Street needs to be programmed and designed intentionally so it doesn't feel like a missing part of the block and has intentionality.
- Consider the indoor/outdoor experiences throughout the site, at the terraces and ground level, how can the landscape architecture coordinate with the building design.

- When considering the pedestrian movement in this area, you've identified there's a strong east west connection, but there's also activity in the north south direction between the arena, stadiums, and areas to the north. Cathedral/Liberty is a major connection, what else can you do to address this? How can you connect the intersection of Park and to this activity?
- The design of the new construction feels like an afterthought. How can the south elevation have more of a presence and feel like a destination. Appreciate the restraint and don't need anything flashy, but the project falls flat on the south side when the building meets the ground. Need more than just the promise of retail.
- Encourage you to revisit the south side, where you're creating the most density, specifically at the first three floors. This is where you have complete control as the historic buildings don't allow for the type of spaces. Need a more intentional urban gesture. This edge is where you have the freedom to articulate it and create a destination.
- This whole edge needs to be considered from the outside in, rather than the inside out. How does it announce itself? how does it ground itself for the next 50-100 years before it becomes historic itself?
- Consider how the event space can be activated when there isn't a show? Can that venue be moved to the second floor so that the ground level has a more active use?
- At Lexington and Howard – how does the event space function at the street level when you have everyone exit at the same time? Can you allow space for people to congregate and slowly disperse?

Building:

- The tower massing is challenging, it might be too tall and massive. The transition is perhaps too drastic.
- If you could add one more level of parking below grade, you could reconsider how you've arranged the program. Consider adding further height to the southwest corner of the site allowing you to reduce the height of the tower. Not sure how the ground floor articulation and use is being transitioned to the upper levels of the lower story building. It could be more deliberate.
- Imagine a street view looking up at the tower, at the moment it just seems overwhelming – maybe the tower portion gets recessed into the lot?
- Disappointed that the parking garage is what touches Park Avenue, understand the need for parking, but this is a missed opportunity.
- How does this project sit with the same confidence and significance of all the other buildings in the district, even though its contemporary?
- Invite you to think of it at an even deeper level, how does each program address the street differently – not at the block level, but at the program level. Need to celebrate the different moments (hotel, event, residential, office, retail, etc.) and give them each their own identity and then connect them.
- Now that you have the nuts and bolts, how do you elevate it and celebrate the space?
- You think of infill development doesn't need to be infilling every inch of the site, be intentional about what you're trying to accomplish here and where to allow for breathing room.

Next Steps:

Work with Planning staff to address the comments prior to moving forward with the review process at CHAP.

Attending:

Chris Janian – Westside Partners

Nick Cooper, Davin Hong, Ross Smith – Hanbury

Charles Patterson – SM+P

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal

Ann Powell, Jim French, Johnathan Tan, Katherine Goode, LieAnne Navarro, Tamara Woods, Esther Park, Sam Englehart, Ryan P, Amber Fults, Nichole Battle, Danise Jones Dorsey – Attendees

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

Nick Chupein, Matt DeSantis, Eddie Leon, Lauren Schiszik, Eric Holcomb, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette**, Chris Ryer - Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff