

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

Date: February 1, 2024

Meeting #87

Project: Harborplace

Phase: Master Plan II

Location: Inner Harbor

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

The presentation is the second Master Plan presentation to the Panel, with the initial presentation occurring on November 16, 2023. Despite this being the second presentation, David Bramble began the presentation with a quick review of the team’s master-planning process, including sharing the team’s wide range of public engagement. A series of goals were set for the project based on what the team heard from their interactions with the public. These goals were taken directly from the public engagement and from the input the team received.

Vaki Mawema with Gensler continued the master plan presentation, 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. Clair Agre of Unknown Studio continued the presentation with a detailed overview of the landscape elements. Details of the proposed upper and lower promenades were shared along with information about the Park at Freedom’s Point, the planting strategy and ways to capture stormwater on and around the site. There was discussion of the raised promenade, and the Panel asked the team to elaborate at several points during the presentation.

Following the introduction to the landscape elements, Mr. Mawema continued the presentation with more detail about each of the five (5) proposed buildings. The team concluded the presentation with a series of enlarged plans and sections showing the public space between the buildings, and side-by-side comparisons of the existing and proposed conditions. The team thanked the Panel for their attention and invited comments and questions.

DISCUSSION:

Pavlina Ilieva, Panel Chair, thanked the team for their presentation and noted that the clarity of what is being proposed is much improved. It was noted that the master planning and systems thinking approach to the project is appropriate for this level of review. The Panel plays the role of having an external eye and hopes that the team will entertain the feedback about ideas that are being discussed today. Despite this being the second presentation, the overall plan has not changed and now the Panel will begin to provide critical feedback for the team as the project moves forward and evolves. The Panel then proceeded with questions and clarification before delivering comments.

Questions / Clarification:

- *There are two pieces of program that seem to be missing: the skating rink and the community boat docking access that will be displaced by the new park program.*
 - *How will the skating rink be relocated within the newly proposed layout of the site?* The team studied this and there are multiple options for locating the rink near its regular location (at the corner of Light and Pratt) or moving it to a more central point near Conway Street at Light.
 - *Where is the boat docking and related programming?* The southern end of the project site will have docking options. The maritime engineers (Moffat Nichol) were part of the conversation on where to place docking for the different types of docking needs and recreational programming that will be added to the site. The integration was key to thinking about how the different scales would work together while also ensuring that existing program was not displaced.
- *How do the floating docks work?* These are ADA accessible, connected by ramp.
- *How does the new building interact with pedestrian circulation / loading specifically, with regard to the drop-off on the 303 Light Street?* For someone coming from the west / south
- *The clarity of the presentation helped to answer many of the landscape questions.* How does the ADA system work? The team was striving to eliminate the need for railings, and a portion of the site qualifies for a different ADA regulation -
- *The upper promenade is raised to 9.5'* which will trigger a stormwater plan. The pitch is similar to what the condition is today. The team is actively looking at how the new elevation will impact Pratt and Light Streets.
- *How is the added water program anticipated to impact the harbor?* This is new program – right now, the ideas are big and there is currently nothing happening on the water. There is no opportunity to kayak, to swim, etc. The team is looking at this at a very high level and will be looking at balancing all the program needs with the restoration components.
- *Is there an attempt to also monitor the water quality?* Yes there is a healthy harbor project
- *How is the project dealing with parking?* The team is looking at including parking within the project, but it is not set. What is set is the idea that any parking will be either wrapped with units / program or be located below grade. The parking will not be visible. There are about 6,500 parking spaces within a quarter mile radius of the site that has a 40% utilization rate.
- *Is there an affordable housing component of the residential?* Yes, there is a 10% requirement to provide housing for 60% AMI. The team will absolutely meet the minimum requirement.
- *Was hotel program considered for the site?*
- *Area of study versus the project boundaries – the team has control over the pavilion footprint, but not over the entire area. It is understood that the vision will become a master plan, but how dependent are the three pieces – the buildings, the street, the waterfront promenade – on each other? Could the buildings be built without the other proposed improvements?* Given the recent flooding, it is pretty clear that the promenade needs to be raised and rebuilt. The RK&K State of Good Repair Report tells us these things. The street narrowing is also an important infrastructure improvement that will be a necessary step for quality of life. These things can happen without the buildings, but the development team feels that all of this is interdependent. The changes will need to happen over time, and the master plan is the first step. The team

anticipates changes over time, but the promenade absolutely needs to be raised in order to protect Baltimore City from future flood events. The systems and rights of way need to be modified. The investment in public space at the Wharf cost nearly \$300 Million, and as a waterfront city, Baltimore needs to be thinking about how it protects and invests in these public spaces.

COMMENTS

In General:

- It is very encouraging to see the drawings being further developed. This presentation has been clearer than the previous presentation. Clarity of the ideas can be challenging because the project is very complex, and there are a lot of pieces.
- The presentation shows a lot of very thoughtful detail, and the team is commended on a very sophisticated presentation that clearly expresses a vision for the future.
- The foundational ideas are absolutely indisputable; connections through the site and the connection to the water are great. That said, exploration of what else could happen in the new parcels seems to have stopped with the initial idea of filling the parcels in with buildings.
 - Opening up views to align with the existing street grid is indeed an obvious move and was encouraged by the Panel years ago when a previous project team brought the site to UDAAP.
 - Creating a physical connection to the waterfront is an absolutely indisputable move.
 - Now that the team has laid out parcel framework, it is time to ask, “what else can happen here?”
- The team has inherited a formerly popular project, which was retail set in a “park” setting. Other waterfront projects are dealing with remediation of former industrial sites, but this project is an update to a project that has become outdated and neglected.
 - The fact that a brownfield site would require more remediation and therefore more financial investment helps with the density argument.
 - People understand that there is a need to cover development costs. This project doesn’t have the same public perception as a hazard site, rather it is seen as a deteriorating public asset.
 - There is no doubt that what is proposed is infinitely better than what is there if it is executed as shown. But even if the argument is that residential and density of program is needed to make the project lively over the next several decades, an exercise in critical thinking is still needed.
- Outreach and big vision are impressive. Incorporating as much as possible from residents’ feedback will help the project feel “authentically Baltimore” which is critical to its success.
- Panel agrees that it is appropriate now to be thinking of the next century of infrastructure with regard to the bulkhead, the streets, and the promenade.
- Buildings appear very finished because of the detailed renders; the Panel will not comment on the building details, as these will be addressed at a subsequent review. The typical process includes reviews at the Schematic and Design Development levels that are more appropriate for the building review. Comments for today will focus on the site, the massing, public space, circulation, etc.
- The viewsheds need to be studied in more detail. The Inner Harbor is utilized by many people and there will be new users introduced to the site with this new development. There is an opportunity to explore the project through a variety of user views to the site, based on how

people are arriving, what their familiarity is, etc. These need to be acknowledged, studied and represented in the presentation.

- The plan gives off an air of exclusivity – the precedents are not very local, except the Wharf precedents.
- Team should consider local precedents to learn from both successes and mistakes. There is an opportunity to look at Fells Point, Harbor Point, Harbor East and really understand if continuity is clearly incorporated and if proposed uses are well matched to the desired quality of the place. Harborplace can be a jewel along the continuation of the promenade and the continuation will not diminish the project.
- Celebrating the grittiness could make this project is more attuned to Baltimore and could feel more welcoming.
- Programming could help to invite people and better integrate the waterfront program and reflect the true cultural tapestry of Baltimore. This will allow the project to more fully center on Baltimore (rather than be seen as a copy of somewhere else, like Copenhagen).
- Treating the water as part of the park is a great idea, but the team must study this to discover the appropriate balance of program – activating the water may pose a challenge for some of the habitat restoration and sustainability goals the team has expressed. It would be helpful to look at tradeoffs and priorities at this early stage of the master plan. The water may not be able to accommodate everything, so which things will be prioritized over others? It will be helpful to understand how these decisions are made and why some goals are prioritized over others.
- The project has a good base to start from – great precedents and a generous public realm. The strong connection to the water with no guard rails, and invitation for people to linger is a very democratizing move.
- The infrastructure and public space will require a lot of investment and upkeep. The upkeep and programming should be part of the thinking as the master plan develops.

Parking and Circulation:

- Locating parking above or below grade on this site will be incredibly challenging; the team mentioned the Wharf in Washington DC, and that is a good project to look at. Parking at the Wharf is a really significant piece of the project and its planning was integral to how the entire development operates.
- Parking should not be an afterthought – the team should be studying how it works, where it is located within the site, how much is expected, etc.
 - Parking is a critical piece of the project, and it is not too early to start thinking about it.
 - Parking impacts the ground plane and right now it seems like a big missing piece, given the residential program.
 - If parking is not being thought about early in the planning, it will not feel integrated – the thought of a big parking garage on the site is worrisome and needs to be confronted early.
 - Structured parking has the ability to significantly change the massing of the buildings; Panel is concerned that if it is not seriously studied garage structure will alter the building form or be exposed on the building façade.
- Minimizing vehicular access points will be critical to the success of the project.
 - The drop-off loop from Light Street is concerning – the vehicle access lanes cross over pedestrian and bicycle paths, and the alignment with the new configuration with a narrower Light Street could pose some issues.

- Conway Street is really important as an arrival point and Panel questions whether this could be a more continuous pedestrian experience to the water.
- Could the service needs share the proposed drop off loop and does this need to be pulled so far into the site? It further undermines the ability of the site to read as a continuous park-like setting rather than just an extension of the city blocks towards the water's edge.
- A lot of the circulation needs more thought and illustration – simple drawings are best for considering the impacts. The drawings do not need to be fully rendered.
- The arrival points could be celebrated more.
 - Need to identify where key nodes are; not every street is equal. The access to the waterfront from Commerce or South is very different from the access from Light Street, or the access from Calvert. In the next iteration, these need to be explored more.
 - Understand the relationship to the major attractions around the site (ball fields, theaters, etc.)
- Development of the vehicular / pedestrian relationships will be of interest to the Panel as the project develops.
 - The Panel needs to have a clear understanding of how the various paths link up across the site at the next presentation.
 - There has been a lot of discussion of how the street grid finds its way to the water with the current proposal, and how pedestrians now have improved visibility and access to the water.
 - At this early stage in the planning, the team should also be thinking about pinch points, moments of overlap between vehicular and non-vehicular traffic, and how pedestrians will be prioritized. Pedestrians will need to be considered not only from a safety standpoint, but also from a wayfinding and activation perspective.
 - A lot of this will be operational; a lot of it is material choices. More complicated traffic flows can help the street feel more like a woonerf and slow traffic naturally.
 - It could be as simple as a series of nuanced cobblestone paths, but this will develop as the plan develops.
- The team must ask, “who will use the space?” because there will be a big difference between how visitors arrive versus how people who live nearby arrive and what that experience is like. This will differ based on transportation – bus stop experience will differ from pedestrian, bicycle, vehicle, metro, etc. The analysis needs to find its way into the design and be clarified.

Landscape:

- The materiality and the history both play a role in acting as welcoming features. These elements are an opportunity to truly reflect the identity of Baltimore, which the team has stated is a main goal here. It seems the proposal is on its way to achieving that.
- The Park at Freedom's Port is truly special. This is a meaningful arrival point that welcomes you in. The organic forms, the sculpting of the topography not only frames the views, but it also provides opportunities of respite.
- There is an opportunity to bring the same level of study and detail (not necessarily of scale) to the other arrival points around the site.
- Landscape typologies can be tremendously successful since the team is thinking about soil types and volumes at this early stage of the project. The landscape is a huge opportunity for education – both about the plants and about what they can do for resilience, cooling, storing, and cleaning water, etc.

- Shore-side program needs to be studied in more detail.
- Baltimore City will determine what is an acceptable risk for flooding; and long-term maintenance will need to be considered as the project develops further.
- Many images show the urban edge extended to the water with a lot of hardscapes but there is a real opportunity to create a space that is more habitable and softer as some of the early conceptual sketches indicated.
- There are examples in Baltimore, such as Harbor East, with high density with retail at the ground level and can give clues to how this type of program fares.
 - The Four Seasons is an example of the buildings pushed up against the water and a lot of hardscapes and this has been open for 10 years or so and is not very active, merely a vehicular circulation drive with no meaningful connection to the promenade or the water so it can be demonstrated that this doesn't necessarily work.
 - Team should be asking what the landscape is like during the non-peak hours when it is not full of people and tourists. How would the large hardscape plaza areas feel if they're not full of hundreds of people at all times as illustrated?
 - As shown, a lot of the landscape lacks intimacy, which makes it feel as if its only designed for tourists, for someone else.
 - This landscape is only a few blocks away from where many people live and work, and should feel like an inviting place to come, to have lunch, to meet a friend, to walk a dog. It needs to have the right scale and layers of interaction to invite people.
 - It would be helpful for the team to clarify what happens in specific spaces – for example, the space under the office building? What is that expected to be used for on a daily basis?
- The landscape needs to operate as a connective tissue. The sketch showing the March Garden City concept does just that. The buildings are organized in such a way that the site remains fundamentally open.
 - This idea is open, soft, and connected to the water.
 - Views are preserved and there is an evolved idea of an open urban park that is on the water.
 - This concept is less formulaic and more innovative than some of the other models that have been shown. This would set it apart from the precedents.
 - It would also allow the sail building some room to breathe and interact with the waterfront setting – because as shown, this iconic building is competing with and being squeezed by the more generic architecture.
- The bulkhead removal is really celebrated by other projects, but this team is proposing a very reasonable rebuilding of the bulkhead with improved access to the water.
 - Many of the other soft edge projects will take decades to build, so it is encouraging to see that this proposal is something that can be built somewhat soon.
 - Landscape design is being used as a mitigating tool between the buildings, rather than as a wonderful continuous experience between Harborplace and the rest of Inner Harbour.
- Park as a memorial is a great start, but there needs to be more study of what that actually means.
 - The memorial is great way to celebrate the history of the place, but whether the park space happens and in this particular version, where all these buildings are landing really hinges on how well the landscape is designed.

- The landscape will help to shape the character and quality of the space. Is it a bunch of pavement with trees sticking out of it? Is it a really lush parkscape with buildings integrated as objects?
- The landscape must be considered with regard to the entire promenade. Buildings do not need to have the same geometry – yes the grid is linear and there is movement through, but there isn't a "there there" in which people are invited to stop and stay in the landscape.
- The engagement with the water is a really critical piece – understanding what is there to do and see will help both the big picture and the more granular scale.

Massing: and Site Organization:

- The approach to the site organization seems to be "extend the street grid to make parcels, preserve the corner as a park, and then construct buildings on each of the other parcels" – while this is a reasonable approach, there needs to be more interrogation of how each parcel engages with its context.
 - For instance, the office building seems to be a placeholder. The team talked about the building contributing to the character of the site, but it seems uncertain that office use would be the program. It is debatable whether office access program alone is suitable at the ground level of this location.
 - Room for innovation here – could the office program be absorbed into a higher density building? A mixed use could be more appropriate and open up options for other parcels.
 - Can the open park space co-exist with some vertical urbanism – a mix of program could open up the ground plane more.
 - The proposed site layout feels similar to the Wharf – this is an opportunity to something different that is unique to Baltimore.
 - The stretch of the entire promenade and the rationale of the entire sequence from Harbor Point to Harbor East, to the Inner Harbor, there is a language of urban edge and then little pavilions that dot the water side. This would bring much needed scale variability between the building and water edges.
 - To what degree was this site debated and discussed with questions like, "How do we want this to read? Does this want to be a public open space with high density? Does the city grid get extended to the water?"
- The proposed project feels as if the edge of the city just comes up to the promenade now, but the Panel questions whether this is necessary or even beneficial to the project. Consolidation of the ground plane could benefit the site.
 - The key is within the connective tissue of the ground plane and
 - Overall attitude of owning all the views, but there are a lot of urban parks that accomplish a sense of integration of density with the water very successfully and are not just like the Wharf.
 - The big ideas are commendable – big shade, big water – but are these actually being executed with this plan?
 - For instance, the big shade idea – remove the street trees and you begin to see how little green is actually being proposed here.
 - The plan that is shown feels a bit more like architect and developer making parcels for buildings and filling in around the edges with green space. This is a real opportunity to lead with landscape while also getting the density correct.
- Navigation of the space between the buildings presents and opportunity for continuation of the street, but in a more unique and exciting way.

- The placement of the sail building seems counter intuitive to the site. The form competes with a very important inflection point (the eastern edge near the World Trade building). The corner of Pratt and Light is critical to the organization of the site; it is the entry point with the sail building framing the view to the Constellation. Entering the site from the other side, from the World Trade center, the building impedes access. The building is unexpected for the Inner Harbor; the eastern corner competes with an important inflection point in the site. This needs to be studied to see if there is more flexibility.
- Bringing life to the site with residential, office, retail and park program is key to having the space be activated 24/7. The sail and office building sites seem to be under-utilized based on another local precedent, the Wharf in DC. The Wharf has approximately 1,500 residential units and a major music venue in addition to the shops and restaurants. This level of density has paid off, as it feels very lively.
- Consider program that stays up later and can activate the site for a longer time throughout the day. The mix and density of program will be critical to ensuring activity, which will help the public space feel vibrant and safe at the same time because there are people and activity.
- The sail building, while beautifully designed, may present the same challenges in 20 years that the existing pavilions present today.
 - As an architectural gesture, it is beautifully designed, but consider whether it will stand the test of time.
 - Even in incredibly dense cities, it is very difficult to have retail thrive if it is located on the 6th floor.
 - Consider whether this is actually viable and if not, look at including a different mix of program at this location on the site.
- Is there an opportunity to have smaller scale pavilions sprinkled throughout the site?
- Do the ground floors of the buildings present an opportunity for increased resilience? The riprap could also showcase resilience with a softer edge and tell the story of an eco-system.

Closing Remarks:

- The next presentation should be less about the rendered views and more about right sizing the program and discussing how the various programmatic elements interact. This can help guide and inform the development of the landscape, the architecture, and the waterfront.
- The level of scrutiny appropriate for the master plan review is program, landscape, circulation, and massing, so these things need to be studied together. It is not a matter of architecture vs. landscape – these are actually baked together as a matter of philosophy and as a matter of scale and proportion.
- The Panel encourages this team to continue the conversation about the site layout as planners, landscape architects, driving the planning process rather than buildings first. The entirety of the site must be considered as a continuous natural environment, where the urban edges are defined and where the buildings find their appropriate boundaries.
- The lines that have been drawn are still flexible and the conversation should remain open as the project develops. Exploration of additional options will help to inform what is wanted, what will work on the site, etc.

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

Jens Holms, Catherine Joseph – 3XN Architects

Vaki Mawema – Gensler

Bryce Turner, Ryan Janes, Chris Holler – BCT Architects

Addison Palmer, Kara Trimpin - STV

Al Barry, Alexis Johns, Beniiamin Magin, Betsy Clark, Catherine Joseph, Charles Place, David Benn, Ed Gunts, Fred Shoken, Giacomo Bologna, Griffin Sanderoff, Isaac Leal, Jack Sullivan, John Pezzulla, Kathy Chonklin, Marvin James, Michael Saxon, Melody Simmons, Nicole Cunningham, Peter Fillat, Peter Smith, Phyllis Fung, Skyler Roberts,

Laurie Schwartz – Waterfront Partnership

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

Doug McCoach – Baltimore City Planning Commission

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

Caitlin Audette**, Chris Ryer, Eric Tiso, Ren Southard, Antoine Heath, Matt DeSantis, Ava Richardson, Amy Gilder-Busatti, Grace Hansen, Jo Birch, Rachel Whiteheart – Department of Planning

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff