

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

**Date:** August 24, 2023

**Meeting #81**

**Project:** Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, South Block

**Phase:** Schematic I

**Location:** 1925 McElderry Street, Johns Hopkins Medical Campus

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Lee Coyle, Senior Director of Planning for Johns Hopkins, introduced the project, which is a new teaching building for the Bloomberg School of Public Health. Tom Jenkins and Andrew Barnett of Hopkins Architects continued the presentation with an overview of the context. The site is located along the east edge of the Johns Hopkins Hospital campus, abutting a residential neighborhood to the east and south of the project site. Surrounding blocks on the east and south are a mix of owner- and renter-occupied residences. Hospital buildings are adjacent to the site on the west and north sides; the recently completed School of Nursing (SON) building is to the east and will share a courtyard space with the School of Public Health (SPH). The building to the north at 610 N. Washington Street is the Bloomberg School of Public Health flagship building. A street closing is planned, which requires additional regulatory actions. The proposed building massing is by right and fits completely within the zoning envelope that was determined during the zoning code re-write.

The following challenges and opportunities drove the building design:

- Flexibility for classrooms and workspace; an un-siloed approach that wraps around the shared spaces to promote maximum collaboration.
- Promote collaboration between students, schools, etc.
- Visibility through the building and transparency within the ground floor spaces.
- Navigation of the grade, which drops significantly (approximately one full story) from the northeast corner to the southeast corner.
- Engagement and gathering, both within the student community and with the broader community surrounding the school.

Susan Weiler of Olin Studio covered the landscape features. The team placed the main entry at the northeast corner because it is the highest point, and it is located nearest the existing public health building. The plazas are intended to provide a gracious entrance space and additional comfort from the street. Landscape will include native plantings at the east edge of the building in a series of stepped planters to help capture stormwater, green roof spaces, and additional street trees. There are also green roof areas proposed; these will be a combination of habitable spaces and extensive green roofs solely for storm water mitigation purposes. The presentation concluded with several renders of the building and landscape for the Panel's consideration.

## DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for the clear presentation and noted that this is an exciting opportunity, but also a challenge with the mix of rowhouse residential around the site. The Panel asked clarifying questions before delivering comments.

## Clarification:

- *How will the trash, recycling and loading be handled?* Team is building on the existing northern loading and service node. This area already serves the existing SPH building, and the team felt this would be a good place to concentrate most of the service functions (between the two SPH buildings). There will be some access to the south of the site near the garage entrance.
- *Is the plaza at the northeast corner strictly for pedestrian use?* Yes, the team feels it is a little early to address the materiality of the street (McElderry). There may be a unit paver to handle vehicular load, and there will be removable bollards at the street corner. Vehicles will not be driving on the
- *Will the vegetated roof features be intensive or extensive?* Where they are connected to building program, they will be occupiable. Otherwise, they are only for stormwater and cooling purposes.
- *With the change in grade from north to south, is the focus on the street or the building?* The planters are meant to navigate the change from the building to the sidewalk. Planters are intended to be viewed as a whole either from the bottom or the top. They will be spaced in such a way that they will feel sequential as a rhythm from the street.
- *Is the street tree / streetscape picking up on the overall pattern of the neighborhood?* Yes, the team has used the standards of the existing streetscape.
- *Is the street elevated at the corner of McElderry and Washington?* Yes, the intent is to table the street to the plaza level and provide a mountable curb at the edge where the removable bollards are proposed for the easternmost edge of McElderry.
- *The southeast entrance connects to the lobby area at a lower level, but how does one navigate the grade within the forum?* There are steps in the middle in the forum / lobby area and an elevator. There are two classrooms that are at the lower grade.
- *Is Jefferson a flat street or does it slope?* Jefferson is more or less flat.
- *What is the purpose of the 2-story mass that projects above the ground floor?* The team needed to address program and wanted to break up the building.
- *What is the thinking about the materiality at the south end of the building as it relates to the rowhouse condition?* The team is maximizing daylight and trying to control solar gain with thin metallic shading. The building is already very articulated in elevation and massing – the team did not want to make the building so busy. The warmer shade is intended to connect the ground floor to the warmer shade of the rowhouses. Consideration is being given to textures for shading / shadow to provide a slightly different read of the materials. There is also a string course at each level of the building.
- *McElderry Street – what is the logic behind using bollard and closure of the street with regard to circulation and pedestrian entries?* There is no change to the traffic pattern for this project, but there are bicycle lanes planned for the future of Washington Street by Baltimore City DOT (see

<https://streetsofbaltimore.com/the-wolfe-washington-bikeway-study>) – the team wanted to focus on making this a pedestrian-friendly space.

## **COMMENTS:**

### **Site:**

- The plaza can be a successful vibrant hub, but it needs tree canopy to make it more welcoming and friendly. Moving west from the plaza, study ways to integrate this area as a pedestrian focused street; use materiality to overcome the service and loading that interrupts the pedestrian path.
- Entrance is nicely positioned, but the plaza poses a challenge; deliberate connectivity to the entrances is key. The plaza must interface with the overall street network and create a direct and meaningful connection to the entrance.
- Rhythm of tree planting and the planting vocabulary will be integral to keeping the language of the streetscape consistent.
- Panel is eager to see a more robust and developed landscape in future presentations; understanding the project is still being developed, there is an expectation the building and landscape will develop together into a nice project.
- As the project develops, focus on universal access.
- Intention of creating a seamless learning process is applauded; this is a forward-thinking approach and will help the team evaluate the design decisions based on a set of good criteria.
- Moving forward with the design, be cautious the building is not simply fitting into the zoning envelope. Massing models tell a story of how the building evolved to its current shape (avoiding an opportunity to fit into the zoning envelope and result in a pyramid shape), but the program could be better articulated on the exterior and could inform the massing.
- Public outreach and engagement – ground floor draws people in but needs to be zoned. Does everyone come through the main entrance or does the secondary entrance address some of this? Use these kinds of questions to help design for clarity of who uses the space, how it is used, when it is used, etc.
- Emphasize pedestrian-friendly streets just beyond the building; there is a huge opportunity to reinforce the aspiration for the campus to make a more human condition (recognize that this will not happen in a single phase).
- Continue the thoughtful approach and balance the program with the service; try tucking the service into the building to make the ground floor more humanized and transparent. The proposed building feels in tune with the other buildings and renovations on the Hopkins Campus. The street scape is the urban interface with the building, and ties into the plaza and transparency of the first floor.
- Plazas at the corners are helping with a more urbane experience of the building – these spaces contribute to student and visitor comfort, but also to the privacy of the rowhouses. Layers of public and private realm are starting to shape up successfully but needs more study of the dynamics of street life.
- The plazas need to be sized correctly for successful use. Consider whether the plaza is too large. The renders show a lot of people, but this could feel barren if it is not well occupied or programmed. There is a fine line between generous public space, and too much space. The rightsizing of this could either occur with a change of the massing or a more detailed design of the plaza.

- Need for bicycle facilities – these are important, but come with a host of issues, especially if this is intended to be a one-lane street. This is a bus route, and there is a lot of vehicular traffic. Be aware of how drop-off locations will impact the site and the street. Communication and coordination will need to be solved on a larger level with Planning and DOT.
- Important to understand whether the bollards are absolutely necessary. There are other ways to prioritize pedestrian and minimize vehicular traffic. Consider the fact that drop-off will introduce the mixing of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Alley closing is absolutely warranted – the first two levels really work on the interior experience, but there needs to be more study about the different spaces and the landscape to achieve this more “stitched together” feel of the various sites.
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### **Building:**

- One area of concern is the Jefferson Street façade – concern that the building could become dated over time. It doesn’t yet respond to the character of the blocks that it is adjacent to.
- Material differences – allowing the setbacks to turn the corner and emphasizing the belt course gives the feeling of a “decorated cake.”
- The building is elegant, but the setbacks are working against this elegance. Try setting the building back along the primary façade and stepping back less at the south end.
- Concern for the mechanical screening at the top of the building. Team should look for ways to reduce the profile of the screen if possible.
- Panel is encouraged to see the team is exploring a less pyramidal scheme; however, there needs to be a bigger step away from pyramid form set by the zoning envelope.
- Team is complimented for thinking about this block holistically with School of Nursing and Wolfe Building, which also contains School of Public Health program.
- The building feels playful and dynamic nature – per the earlier comment about the form and materiality giving the impression of a layer cake: this is reinforced through the horizontality of the building. The irregularity of the windows further reinforces the stacked nature of the horizontal volumes.
- The massing model allows it to read as one-, two- and three-story volumes sliding together. There is an over emphasis of the existing levels. Where the massing is a 3-story volume, there is an opportunity for the volumes to read as such instead of stacked layers. Windows could align and connect to reinforce the volumes for a more aligned (consolidated) read of the volume. This will help with the scale of the building.
  - Multi-story read should be at the Jefferson Washington corner and the lobby.
  - Smaller one-story volumes will be more successful as the one-story read.
- The layers are a good background to stand on but can start to break away from this a little more.

### **Next Steps:**

Continue design addressing comments above. Work with Planning staff prior to returning to UDAAP.

### **Attending:**

Lee Coyle, Jennifer Mielke, Michael Preston, Stacey Ko – Johns Hopkins  
Andrew Barnett, Tom Jenkins - Hopkins Architects  
Susan Weiler, Sarah Leasley - The Olin Studio

Peter Blum – HCM

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal

Edward Couvillion, Paul Lund, Ronal Corrado, Stephanie McKenzie, Wendy Phillips, Maria Tildon, Matt Hooke, Damien Lee, Bob McLean, Peter Smith, Mitch Bonanno, Scott Walters – Attendees

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

Ren Southard\*\*, Caitlin Audette, Matt DeSantis, Imani Jasper - Planning

\* UDAAP Chairperson

\*\* Assigned Planning Staff