

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

**Date:** August 24, 2023

**Meeting #81**

**Project:** Park Heights Library

**Phase:** Schematic II

**Location:** 4800 Park Heights Avenue, Central Park Heights, Baltimore 21215

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Connie Kumor of Gant Brunnett Architects introduced the team and project: a new library building located on a site shared with CC Jackson Park in the Central Park Heights neighborhood. The library will be located at the corner of Park Heights and Woodlands Avenues, in the Park Heights Major Redevelopment Area (MRA). This is the team's second presentation to the Panel and the updated design addresses a majority of the Panel's comments from the previous review. Scott Scarfone of Mahan Rykiel gave a brief overview of the project site context. The redevelopment is a years-long planning project and has acquired approximately 62 acres and awarded several sites for redevelopment near CC Jackson Park and the new library. The awarded redevelopment sites include multi-family, mixed-use and single-family detached redevelopment.

The team presented previous concepts with an overview of the comments from the Panel, followed by the updated design. The following changes have been made to the project:

- Main entrance is located on the southeast side of the building, on Woodland Avenue with the plaza extending from the corner of Woodland and Park Heights Avenues to the parking lot.
- The public plaza now connects from the corner to the entrance in a more direct and meaningful way than the previous design.
- The Park Heights Avenue façade has changed due to the program locations within the building.
- The elevation facing the parking lot is more utilitarian with a ramp to the side (service) door.
- A theme of nature will be carried into the building as a nod to the park landscape.

The following has not changed:

- Building is approximately 16,000 SF to accommodate the library program, which includes admin, stacks, children's library, young adult section, community space, food pantry, etc.
- The landscape is a combination of programmed space, and circulation.
- Collections are located on Park Heights Avenue and emphasized with additional glazing; children's library is located on the north toward the park and has a dedicated fenced outdoor patio space.
- There is a bus stop at the corner of Park Heights and Woodlands Avenues; the library will provide free wi-fi access, and the plaza design includes comfortable places for people to sit while waiting for the bus.
- Streetscape design is based on the approved ROW design for CC Jackson Park.

- Library is intended to serve a large catchment in an area that is currently a library desert. Many library patrons are expected to come from the south, east, and west.
- The library is designed to have a relationship with the park – visibility to the park from within, and visibility of the stacks from outside were both key design elements.

The project team concluded the presentation with a series of updated elevations. The updated elevations included few material details, as the team wanted to gauge Panel response to the massing before applying too much detail to the various façades.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The Panel thanked the team for the clear presentation and for the team’s commitment to developing the project. In general, the Panel is pleased with the responsiveness to the past comments, but it was acknowledged there is more work to be done. The Panel then moved into clarifying questions and comments.

### **Clarification:**

- *Is the collection space the gathering space?* Yes, it is the main public space for gathering and also houses the collection of books. There are additional meeting rooms and study rooms of various sizes that will be publicly accessible.
- *Is the library function / program mostly contained within the building?* Yes, the connection to the exterior is mostly for children’s collection and special events. The visual connection will be maintained to the exterior, but the fenced area will not be open / accessible at all times.
- *What kind of deliveries are anticipated?* Library van is responsible for delivering books; the van is smaller scale and deliveries can occur at almost any time of day. Loop from Woodland will need to allow for a van to drive up and unload during business hours. Box vehicle will back into the second bay, which is how the parking loop design evolved.
- *Can the parking lot really work with a single entrance?* The team had a second access point when the CC Jackson portion of the project came before the Panel. UDAAP feedback was to eliminate the entrance at Homer Avenue and the team adjusted the plan accordingly.
- *Please explain the slope that was noted from Park Heights Avenue toward the southwest.* This slope is less than 5% but a few steps are needed to achieve a level plaza space. The sidewalk will be sloped accordingly and will be ADA compliant.
- *Did the team consider opening up the glazing to the park?* The team introduced a larger curtain wall element in place of the previous plan which had a large blank wall. There is fine line between glazing and wall based on the need for shelving, etc. Interior program was balanced with the lighting and views.
- *Are the doors for the pantry and the multi-purpose room intended to be secondary egress?* Yes.
- *The team mentioned there is a multi-purpose space within the library. Considering that CC Jackson Rec. Center is located at the north of the site, has the team evaluated whether this space is necessary for the new building?*

## **COMMENTS:**

### **In General:**

- Deliberate and intentional approach will be iterative by nature – this project will thrive with an approach that balances the inside and outside. This is a rare opportunity for a new library in a park setting in an urban area with a lot of ongoing redevelopment.
- Allowing the project to evolve in a non-linear fashion has been a successful approach for the team. The Panel is pleased with the development of the project to date. There are some additional points to work on, but the project is moving in the right direction.
- Design universe is limitless – but it won't represent Park Heights until you start to look at the neighborhood and start to connect meaningfully to it. Look at award-winning neighborhood libraries – utilize the most inspiring ideas as a starting point.
- There are already ideas about nature integrated in the language the team is using, but these could be imbedded meaningfully in the design. Use the building to create more clarity and purpose around the relationship with the (CC Jackson Park) site.
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### **Site:**

- Reorganization of the site plan is a great improvement – the front plaza now addresses Woodland, Park Heights, building and the neighborhood.
- The plaza area now functions like a true front porch; it operates as a collection point for people arriving at the site and guides them from either the parking lot or the bus stop to the front entrance.
- Central axis of the courtyard will never be perceived in plan – design this based on pedestrian movement. What are the significant movements that can help shape the simple formal moves? As designed, the plaza seems large and undifferentiated. There is an opportunity to design spaces that hold variety of program – tie the internal program to the outside to inform uses.
- Don't get too hung up on axial relationships that are happening in plan. Design in 3-dimensions rather than just in plan. Think about how people will actually experience the building from the exterior as they approach it.
- Entrance is hugely improved from the initial proposal. If it is not possible to have a second entrance, there needs to be a stronger connection the park.
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### **Building:**

- Overall, this proposal is an improvement but the architecture and massing need refinement with regard to the program. The interior spaces are all different, but they are not yet reflected in the volume, massing, or façade. Having these spaces reflected on the exterior of the building will be key to moving the design forward.
- The Panel does not really comment on the interior except with regard to how it impacts the façade of the building. That said, the restroom and lobby placement are obstacles to the building's relationship to the plaza.
- Lobby and restroom organization:
  - Having the lobby on the central axis compromises some of the interior relationships – the lobby is on the verge of feeling as though it is part of the restroom area; this is also true of the pantry. The lobby needs to be prioritized as a primary use, with the restroom

as a secondary (subordinate) use. The pantry needs a more dignified relationship with both the lobby and the plaza.

- The primary role of the lobby is to organize program – there is a great opportunity to shift the lobby into the area where the public restrooms are currently location. This will allow for the lobby to connect to the main collection and to the support spaces. Shifting the main entrance will break the arbitrary symmetry, shifting the center of gravity of the building. This is a real opportunity for a good design moment – if well executed, this will make the entry exciting, public, and welcoming.
- Rearranging the restrooms will also provide more breathing room between the restrooms, meeting rooms, and pantry. The lobby can then operate as a hub.
- Pantry area:
  - The pantry needs to be more than just a door in a wall. Locate it properly to make the experience more dignified.
  - Leverage the inside / outside spaces to make the most of both; make these great quality spaces that have a relationship with each other. Making the pantry an inviting experience will give it more dignity.
- Façades:
  - The way the program fits together is very rational, but the location of restrooms is concerning – if the restrooms can be relocated (shifted to the southwest), the façade will have more activation; shifting the restroom location also opens up the opportunity for a meaningful indoor / outdoor relationship with the plaza.
  - The fenestration is centralized on each of the façades – the windows and openings don't need to be so symmetrical or have such a structured rhythm. Consider how the openings could be disbursed around the building, using the program to guide placement as the façade and massing develop.
- Massing and architecture:
  - As designed, the building feels a bit brutalist. Position the project in the context of today, then apply the context of the location. Consider what it means to be a library in 2023 (and beyond) in Park Heights. How does this inform the design? What are the opportunities to relate to technology and community?
  - Consider the best practices for libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century... what the library values, what are the goals from an architecture perspective, community perspective?
  - Relate or create the context. Ok to reuse elements from other libraries, but scale the elements to the context – group the windows for maximum light. Study the interior spaces with regard to the daylighting opportunities – element of the curtain wall is a nice picture frame, but there is an opportunity to provide clerestory?
  - Windows need to relate to what is happening with regard to both the program on the interior and the views of the park.
  - The lower portion of the plan where the utility and staff program are located creates a very solid wall. Team is encouraged to incorporate more daylight into staff room. The utility core should be reorganized to accommodate more windows.
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### **Moving Ahead:**

- Refine the exterior of the building – team is encouraged to embrace a complete design process; interrogate the process and decisions, use non-linear and iterative processes to achieve meaningful balance.

- Make sure the façades are responding to the exterior context and the interior program needs. This will help the building feel more authentic overall and resolve many of the challenges for the massing and fenestration locations.
- Team has a good track record of solving design problems. The Panel has full faith that the project will move forward meaningfully and become a highly valued asset for the Park Heights Community.
- From the very beginning, Planning has advocated for a fun, artistic, bold space (inside and out); Maybe it's too early, but moving ahead it will be important to see bold colors, bold library themes, and art that relates to Park Heights as part of the design.

**Next Steps:**

Continue design addressing comments above. Work with Planning staff to complete design review prior to submitting for permits and / or other required development reviews.

**Attending:**

Gordon Krabbe, Clarence Felder – Enoch Pratt Free Library  
 Connie Kumor, Jim McArthur – Gant Brunnett Architects  
 Scott Scarfone – Mahan Rykiel  
 Husam Albattawi – Baltimore City DGS  
 Kate Brower – Baltimore City Recreation and Parks

Kelly Baccala – Baltimore City DHCD  
 Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl  
 Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal  
 Brandon Brooks, Barbara Wim, Jocelyn Larson – Attendees

Pavlina Ilieva\*, Anthony Osbourne, Sharon Bradley – UDAAP Panel  
 Ren Southard\*\*, Caitlin Audette, Eric Tiso, Matt DeSantis, Kari Nye, Chris Ryer – Planning

\* UDAAP Chairperson

\*\* Assigned Planning Staff