

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

**Date:** August 3, 2023

**Meeting #80**

**Project:** Sisson Street East

**Phase:** Design Development I

**Location:** Block bounded by 28<sup>th</sup> St. / Sisson / 29<sup>th</sup> St. / Hampden Ave., Baltimore MD 21211

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Jon Constable of Seawall reintroduced the project and noted that the team is very excited to share the changes since the last presentation to the panel. Chris Holler of BCT Design Group continued the presentation. The project program has not changed, but the team added some sustainability goals, including rideshare and alternative mobility, shading, energy efficiency and on-site energy production opportunities. The team hopes to also pl achieve a LEED certification.

The presentation continued with a brief recap of program, land use, and neighborhood context before moving into the comments from the previous UDAAP presentation that were addressed by the current proposal. Comments from the previous version that drove this version of the project design included the following:

- Relocated the residential loading from 28th Street to promote a feeling of continuation and connection to the west; residential elevators were decoupled, and one elevator was moved to the 29th street.
- Moved one elevator to the 29th street side to allow for a secondary entrance to the building. This is a walkable neighborhood, and having entrances on both sides will contribute to the walkable feel, making the building more accessible to the amenities on the north side.
- Building along Hampden were too tall for a feeling of compatibility. Program is spread around the site a little differently.
- Rethinking of the adaptively reused building to make it less of an object and fit better into the overall site by transforming it more to fit with the development.
- Reexamined the relationship of the existing building to the larger mass of the multi-family building and used this proximity as an opportunity for the existing building and the base of the residential structure to have a meaningful exchange. The base of the new is now in conversation with the existing and vice versa.

The presentation also included a step forward with the building façades, including preliminary thoughts on fenestration and materiality. The team is starting to organize the buildings with color and textures; building façade approach focuses heavily on creating points of interest and connection with the existing neighborhood buildings.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The Panel thanked the team for the very clear and thorough presentation and noted that the team did a nice job of incorporating feedback into this iteration of the project. The Panel then moved into clarifying questions and comments in the interest of time.

### **Clarification:**

- *Pedestrian access, office entrance, and drop off all occur on 29<sup>th</sup> Street in close proximity. What is happening to mitigate the potential entanglement of all of these access points and circulation patterns?* Primary and secondary office entrances are located on 29<sup>th</sup> Street, and the tree spacing will vary slightly from the 30' regular interval to accommodate vehicular traffic. The radii are tight for vehicular traffic, which will slow vehicles considerably. The treatment of the ground floor of the building will be transparent and bright to denote this as a plaza area.
- *With 29<sup>th</sup> Street as a west-bound one-way, passengers will be getting out on the wrong side of the drop off lane. How will that work?* The team has studied this, and passengers will exit vehicles and cross in front of the car if needed. Not that many people ride in the back of taxi and ride share vehicles, so not all passengers will be existing from the front passenger seat. There will be ample space to accommodate pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and the team is working on slowing drivers down in the drop-off space.
- *Entrances to the plaza areas from 28<sup>th</sup> and Sisson Streets still have a sense of privacy to them; what will draw people into the plaza spaces?* The team is looking at the buildings as canvas space to draw people in. There will likely be murals and activity to catch interest and let people know there is something happening beyond. Additionally, the openings have gotten wider, and more welcoming.
- *What is the size of the tree pit in the plaza?* The goal is for a 5" caliper tree; this size seems like an appropriate size for the raised bed tree pit which will be able to provide ample root space for a tree of that size.
- *Sisson Street access – what is the slope there?* This is a 5% walkway – it is not a ramp, but it is slightly sloped ADA accessible pathway.
- *Connection to the Baltimore Greenway Trail – where does this occur?* This is actually located to the north the connection is directly to the north of Wyman Park.
- *What are the programs / anticipated tenants for the reused buildings?* Tenants are not secured at this point, but anticipated uses will be entertainment / hospitality, retail, and / or healthcare.

## **COMMENTS:**

### **Site:**

- Access points and connectivity:
  - Pedestrian access on 29<sup>th</sup> Street seems to be downhill from the entrance, which is a disadvantage. The drop-off area needs to be more generous to accommodate pedestrian safety. The fact that this is a one-way street will compound the challenges of managing the pedestrian and vehicular circulation.

- Last time, the Panel advised that the project needs to feel more connected and continuous. The landscape has really helped with the project feeling more connected. Landscape and architecture need to work together now. Use the periphery of the site to pull people in. Moving the service entrance is significant and helps to connect the bases of the buildings without interrupting the pedestrian experience, which is excellent.
- Renderings on the ground are great reminder of how people will experience the project and humanize it. The spaces that host human interaction are critical to the success of the project. Please continue to develop the (landscape and building) pieces of these public realm opportunities together.
- The grade changes create opportunities for excitement and activity.
- Relationship to existing neighborhood:
  - Interesting site with interesting context, but this creates a challenge with the buildings relating to the existing neighborhood.
  - The adaptively reused building could be stronger – the Panel likes the idea of adaptive reuse, and striving to make sure the new relates to the existing, but these elements need a bit more work to be convincing.
  - Appreciate the scale, stoop, and ratio of planting to hardscape on the Hampden Street side. It is important to maintain the stoop culture of the neighborhood as this new project develops, and these elements will contribute to this block keeping the “stoop” feel that currently exists there.
- Plaza / courtyard spaces:
  - Ramp along 28<sup>th</sup> Street is a great opportunity to draw people in and become a pleasant entry point. Panel appreciates that the ADA access is baked in and doesn’t feel as “other” or separate.
  - This iteration includes some great ideas for carving out outdoor space / plazas / courtyards that act as connectors between the buildings.
  - Sense of discovery between the buildings is important; interior plazas need more of a hint from the street.
  - The murals should be selectively placed on the buildings – the artist should have selective “canvases” to indicate places of public access / places of importance.
- Key maps are not quite accurate – please update them for future presentations.

### **Architecture:**

- 28<sup>th</sup> Street façades:
  - Privacy issue between the rooftop deck and the residential units adjacent to the east. Provide some measure of visual privacy (and consider how noise may carry up to the other floors).
  - The dark panel at the transition from the building along 28<sup>th</sup> Street to the “rowhouse” typology along Hampden needs to be cleaned up and refined.
  - Break between these buildings needs to be more deliberate at the top, while allowing the ground level experience to remain more continuous.
  - There seems to be a disconnect with the project; certain moments indicate “this is fun” and others send the message that this is “not fun” meaning it is meant to be serious – break these lines down (along 28<sup>th</sup> Street) and don’t let the alley / entry to the courtyard become a disconnect. Allow these to blend a bit more to really promote the cohesiveness.

- The market experience needs to melt into the building experience. The moment the market is out of sight, the project becomes less exciting.
- The brick tone at the top of the building feels very heavy. Consider changing this to the metal panel and allow it to complete itself as a lighter mass over a very active, exciting base.
- Hampden Avenue façades:
  - The interplay between the two materials on Hampden Avenue is more successful in clarifying the massing and relating to the homes across the street.
  - This is a large development so needs to feel like it is “of the place” – fake rowhouse approach will not work here. Extract the language from the rowhouse typology but dial it back. Consider reducing the canopy sizes and rethinking the proportions and material distribution on this side (Hampden Avenue) of the building.
  - Rowhouse language – working off a motif of the existing language requires a level of sophistication that has not yet been achieved with this iteration. Keep going with the design to achieve the sophistication the project is capable of.
  - While the grey panel ties things together, this can make the building feel even larger. It can feel relentless all around.
  - Project is coming along nicely, and the idea of the rowhouses is great but the organization of the materials needs more study.
- 29<sup>th</sup> Street façades:
  - The façade facing east on 29<sup>th</sup> Street (office building looking back from the corner) feels a little compressed. The aspect ratio of the openings may need to be more square or even more horizontal to help the read.
- Sisson Street façades:
  - Review the openings on the West Office Elevation sheet – these read as a bit squished and would benefit from revising the structural grid spacing to allow them a more horizontal read. Giving it 5 bays instead of 6 bays will give it a more authentic old-world warehouse feel.
  - Brown on brown on brown approach should be reconsidered. The office building could have more lightness and playfulness. Does the building want to have a more excited attitude to feel as though it fits into this new development more?
- Existing building to be adaptively reused:
  - Windows in the different buildings can be different scales – look at the uses, the massing, the openings, and reconsider the window typologies.
- In general:
  - Team has done a great job with programming, sustainability goals, etc. Now is the time to edit the project back and rein it in for more clarity. There is a lot going on, and at a certain point there needs to be a bit more selectivity to knit the development together.
  - Utilize the neighborhood as a space of discovery.
  - Vision for the project is great – non-linear process (addition, subtraction) of design will allow the design to move forward through an iterative process. Keep going with the intention but be mindful of the execution.
  - Generic architecture is ok, but mimicking generic design is a bit underwhelming. The low-key “good neighbor” quality is appropriate; look at how the residential and office portion of the project are working together.
  - Consider a color change to reinforce the idea that the block is a collection of buildings with separate read of the various portions of the neighborhood. The different sides of the neighborhood necessitate different responses.

**Next Steps:**

Continue addressing the comments above and work with Department of Planning staff on next steps.

**Attending:**

Jon Constable – Seawall

Alex Aaron – Blank Slate Development

Paul Evenson, Chris Holler, Brandon Brooks, Bryce Turner – Brown Craig Turner Architects

Peng Gu, Fred Mason – Mahan Rykiel Associates

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Melody Simmons – Baltimore Business Journal

Deon Butler, Katie Marshall, Melanie Monaco, Ryan Hochfelden, Todd Connelly – Attendees

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

Ren Southard\*\*, Caitlin Audette, Marie McSweeney Anderson, Chris Ryer - Planning

\* UDAAP Chairperson

\*\* Assigned Planning Staff