

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

<b>Date:</b>	September 21, 2017	<b>Meeting No.:</b> 246
<b>Project:</b>	Roberta's House	<b>Phase:</b> Schematic
<b>Location:</b>	E. North Avenue and Cecil Avenue	

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**PRESENTATION:**

Representatives of Roberta's House and Penza + Bailey Architects presented schematic design for Roberta's House, a family grief support center.

The project site represents a full urban block along East North Avenue and defined by Cecil Avenue as the eastern boundary and Oakhill Avenue as the western boundary. Adjacent urban blocks along North Avenue are distinguished by a continuous row of three-story townhomes, defining a strong building edge and street wall.

The program consists of a three-story 20,000 sq. ft. facility devoted to providing needed family grief support and counseling. The first floor of the proposed facility consists of public spaces, theatre, community multi-purpose room and indoor play area. The upper floors are devoted to counseling, therapy, and staff support. As proposed, the building is situated on the far east side of the site at the intersection of North and Cecil Avenues. A surface parking lot for staff and visitor's is located on the western half of the site and visually exposed to North Avenue.

The Architect's stated objective was to design a building that would "reach out and be an integral part of the community." To that end the Architects did not want the building to look institutional but look "residential in scale and character", creating a "welcoming home."

**COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL:**

The Panel expressed strong support for the mission of Roberta's House and acknowledged the leadership and vision of the March Family in providing this facility and needed services to the citizens of Baltimore. The Panel looks forward to working with the Architect to ensure that programmatic, community and urban design goals for the project are successfully realized. To that purpose, the Panel offered the following comments for careful consideration:

## **URBAN DESIGN:**

### **1. Respect the North Avenue Street Wall/Edge:**

The existing historic urban typology establishes a strong and continuous edge of three story townhomes along North Avenue. By concentrating the proposed building program on the east side of the site and creating a surface parking lot on the west side, the design ignores the historic importance and integrity of the street wall edge, neighborhood context and character. The Panel strongly recommended reorienting the building so as to extend the façade and massing along North Avenue as much as possible in order to respect and reinforce the established urban design typology. As noted, the “gap” or “missing tooth” created by the parking lot could be resolved by introducing a more linear building organization along North Avenue and placing the parking to the back of the site along the alley.

### **2. The Importance of Holding to Corner:**

The proposed design sets back the building from the corner intersection at North and Cecil Avenues. The Panel questioned the desirability of eroding this corner and violating established urban typology. Should there be a need for outdoor seating and social gathering, the Panel felt it would best be accommodated mid-block and allow the building mass to hold and command the corner.

### **3. The Need to Define Strong Edges:**

The Panel advocated reorienting the building to claim the entire block along North Avenue not just half of the block. This would establish a strong street wall edge, consistent with surrounding context as well as making the building more prominent and significant. In addition to employing architecture to define edges, the Panel recommended a landscape architect be retained to reinforce edges and define public, semi-public and private zones. An important urban design consideration is the employment of a cadence of street trees along North, Cecil and Oakhill Avenues to define edges and elevate the public realm. Incorporate and design a stronger connection to the sense of ‘retreat’ and ‘threshold’ as they tie to the mission of the organization as it was described.

## **ARCHITECTURE:**

### **1. Simplify the building massing creating an “Object Building” that is less self-important and more sympathetic to the urban context:**

The Panel felt the proposed massing was highly animated and undermines the urban design intent. The use of circular turrets, towers, bay windows, balconies,

porches, upper floor terraces and building set-backs should be employed to reinforce the overall whole of the composition without calling attention to each item individually. The Panel urged restraint.

**2. Simplify and edit the North Avenue façade, in particular, to rely less on the use of multiple architectural motifs, styles and elements.**

The Panel felt the North Avenue façade was a somewhat unresolved pastiche of competing historic motifs, architectural elements, materials and coloration.

In order to advance the design, the Panel posed the following questions:

- Should the North Avenue façade convey a sense of a stately mansion or a more humble welcoming home?
- To what extent does the architecture expression and massing need to contextually “fit in” to be an integral and significant part of the community?
- To what extent should the architecture expression promote or convey the mission of Roberta’s House?

**PANEL ACTION:**

Recommend Continue schematic development responding to the above comments.

**Attending:**

Daniel Bailey, Laura Thul Penza, Adam Read – Penza Bailey Architects

Annette March-Green – Roberta’s House

Harish Patel, Misrak Tatek – EBA Engineering, Inc.

Daniel McCarthy – Episcopal Housing

Carley Milligan - BBJ

Messrs. Bowden and Burns\*, Mses. O’Neill and Ilieva - UDARP Panel

Anthony Cataldo, Christina Hartsfield, Marshella Wallace, Wolde Ararsa, Tamara Woods - Planning