

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

**FROM:** Laura Shipman  
Design Advisory Panel Liaison

**PROJECT:** Avocet Tower  
Sketch Plan No. 320180070 and Site Plan No. 820180040

**DATE:** December 13, 2017

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*The **Avocet Tower** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **December 13, 2017**. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel's discussion, and recommendations regarding design excellence and the exceptional design public benefits points. The Panel's recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report and strongly considered by Staff prior to the certification of the Site Plan. Should you have any additional questions and/or comments please feel free to contact the Design Advisory Panel Liaison.*

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## **Attendance:**

Karl Du Puy (Panelist)  
George Dove (Panelist)  
Damon Orobona (Panelist)  
Rod Henderer (Panelist)  
Qiaojue Yu (Panelist)  
Paul Mortensen (Panelist, Senior Urban Designer in the Director's Office)

Laura Shipman (Design Advisory Panel Liaison)  
Elza Hisel-McCoy (Lead Plan Reviewer)  
Gwen Wright (Planning Department Director)  
Robert Kronenberg (Area 1 Division Chief)  
Michael Brown (Area 1 Master Plan Supervisor)  
Leslye Howerton (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Neil Sullivan (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Margaret Rifkin (Director's Office)

Jane Mahaffie (Developer, Applicant Team)  
Chris Smith (Developer, Applicant Team)  
Doug Firstenberg (Developer, Applicant Team)  
John Pickard (Architect, Applicant Team)  
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Justin Doro (Architect, Applicant Team)  
Steve Smith (Architect, Applicant Team)  
Trini Rodriguez (Landscape Architect, Applicant Team)  
Robert Dalrymple (Attorney, Applicant Team)  
Matthew Gordon (Attorney, Applicant Team)

Bethany Rodgers (Member of the Public, Bethesda Magazine)

### Discussion Points:

- Is the floorplate designed for single or multi-tenant use?
  - *Applicant response:* The design works best with full-floor users on the top floors and multi-tenant on lower floors. The site is a fairly narrow and longer site and a center core would have made narrow bands on sides. The site configuration lends itself to this plan with a side core.
- What happens if the adjacent Marriott property redevelops in terms of tower separation?
  - *Applicant response:* There is a setback on the glass areas. The existing Marriott building has an interesting play with the proposed building and is off-angle so windows not directly facing. There would not be much impact on glass areas particularly.
- What happens with the curtain wall at night?
  - *Applicant response:* Lights for the parking garage are really softly done so that at night you get a sense that there is activity back there.
- Do you have any rendered images of the Waverly elevation?
  - *Applicant response:* No do not but reviewed in plan. The loading doors to be carefully detailed.
- Waverly façade upper floors do not seem to interlock or integrate with the base.
- What is the lane on Montgomery Ave?
  - *Applicant response:* A future two-way cycle track.
- Having a two-way cycle track on a one-way street is confusing.
- How does the lay-by for the hotel on Montgomery work with the bike lanes?
- Consider how the bike path should function and how it relates to vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Consider raising the pedestrian crossing from the lay-by on Montgomery Avenue so that cyclists yield to pedestrians.
- The idea of the plaza living rooms is a good one, and so is the water feature. Is the water feature going to be stone? It will look great in the winter when the water is off.
  - *Applicant response:* yes, the water feature will be stone.
- How is stormwater management integrated into the design?
  - *Applicant response:* stormwater retention is provided on the green roof and stormwater biofiltration is provided in the building setback.



- The addition of the public artwork scales down the scale of the entrance plaza and is positive addition.
- With the use of ipe wood there is a concern about sustainability. Should explore local sourcing of materials.
  - *Applicant response:* We are considering local material alternatives.
- The sidewalk transition is abrupt between the proposal and the adjacent property. Is there a way to maintain consistent sidewalk paving color to integrate with the streetscape standard for continuity particularly in the transition zone?
  - *Applicant response:* Opportunity to expand the plaza out into sidewalk, pulls people in and expands area to feel integrated. Originally the sidewalk was designed as separate from the plaza, but wanted space to be permeable and porous. There is a change in texture at the south end to smaller-sized pavers to transition to the adjacent property sidewalk.
- How the adjacent historic building integrates with the plaza space is still unclear. Bringing the streetscape in may help with the transition.
- Are food and beverage provided on the ground floor of the hotel? Is there a hard line between hotel and office lobby areas?
  - *Applicant response:* Totally integrating technology throughout building as well as food and beverage throughout and in the outdoor space. Seating will be provided throughout the plaza and ground floor to activate the whole area. There is no hard line between the Hotel and Office lobby areas, this should act as a free-flowing space that can be used by anyone. This should be a place to meet and conference indoors or outdoors.
- In Bethesda they have avoided having covered public spaces for many years. In this case plenty of light will be available because of the height of the space.
- The design is refreshing because of the layering of uses, and allows different uses on different floors.
- The models do not do justice to project as well as the renderings to show the quality of the skin. Through multifaceted massing and subtle variation in façade. There is an underlying scrim of the façade onto which other materials are layered.
- The building will serve as a dramatic landmark.
- Concern on the Waverly side of the building, is there any way to internalize the loading? I know the answer is no, but it is too bad if Waverly is neglected.
  - *Applicant response:* Waverly will continue to be thought through as a way to have it thoughtfully detailed. Based on staff comments have narrowed driveways and added trees. There are utility conflicts and we have been working on how to best design this side of the building.
- Are there any uses on the roofscape?
  - *Applicant response:* The roofscape will be purely a garden because of 250 foot height cap. Only architectural embellishments will be included on top.
- The proportions of the bars on the Wisconsin Avenue façade seem too similar, one should be dominant. (Note: some other panelists disagree).



- *Applicant response:* There is a plan logic for the massing based on the structural frame. One side acts as light house and is dominant in height and prominence.
- Public realm terrific, but not convinced by three pieces of architecture in one building. Certain lines could come across all three volumes to provide better integration. (Note: some other panelists disagree).

**Panel Recommendations:**

The following recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report.

1. Public Benefit Points: The majority of the panel recommends the 30 of 30 Exceptional Design points requested. However, there was a dissenting opinion that the project did not provide enough integration between the base and upper floors or between the three distinct pieces of architecture articulated on the Montgomery Avenue façade to achieve this many points.
2. Further consider how the bike path should function and how it relates to vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Consider raising the pedestrian crossing from the lay-by on Montgomery Avenue so that cyclists yield to pedestrians.
3. Explore local sourcing of materials rather than using materials such as ipe.
4. Provide a less abrupt transition between the proposed and adjacent sidewalk. Consider using the same color as the streetscape standard paving for continuity.



# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

**FROM:** Laura Shipman  
*Design Advisory Panel Liaison*

**PROJECT:** 7820 Wisconsin/7815 Woodmont  
Sketch Plan No. N/A

**DATE:** December 13, 2017

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*The **7820 Wisconsin/7815 Woodmont** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **December 13, 2017**. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel's discussion, and recommendations regarding design excellence and the exceptional design public benefits points. The Panel's recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report and strongly considered by Staff prior to the certification of the Site Plan. Should you have any additional questions and/or comments please feel free to contact the Design Advisory Panel Liaison.*

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## **Attendance:**

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Gwen Wright (Planning Department Director)  
Robert Kronenberg (Area 1 Division Chief)  
Elza Hisel-McCoy (Area 1 Regulatory Supervisor)  
Michael Brown (Area 1 Master Plan Supervisor)  
Leslye Howerton (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Neil Sullivan (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Margaret Rifkin (Director's Office)

Joshua Sloan (Planner, Applicant Team)  
Nick Mansperger (Architect, Applicant Team)  
Ian P. Duke (Planner, Applicant Team)  
Barbara Sears (Attorney, Applicant Team)  
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Phillip Hummel (Attorney, Applicant Team)  
Aris Mardirossian (Applicant Team)  
Ed Hutchins (Applicant Team)

Bethany Rodgers (Member of the Public, Bethesda Magazine)

### Discussion Points:

- The project is increasing FAR from 3 to 13? Is the justification based on MPDUs? Does this justify quadrupling the FAR?
  - *Applicant response:* The Sector Plan allows 290 feet with 25% MPDUs. Extra height is also permitted to accommodate these MPDUs to go to 314 feet. The FAR is what is needed to fill to this height.
- Feels like very bulky massive building that consumes the site. It is an abrupt façade especially if the park is created. Note another panel member noted that this is a good scheme to pack in program on constrained site.
- How does this proposal align with the sector plan recommendation for a park on the block?
- The design guidelines call for, even if the adjacent site not provided as park, that there be tower separation from the adjacent site.
  - *Applicant response:* The limited site depth allows only 70-foot building width. This is a constrained site and the location of the core is constrained. If the building is reduced some units would be compromised or go away, and it would decrease the marketability of units.
- You can do a 60-foot wide residential building instead of 70-foot.
- The concern is the potential location of a park to the south and the relationship of the park to the building.
  - *Applicant response:* Based on the Sector Plan process this development wasn't to be controlled by what happens to the south. The development conforms to the request for MPDUs on this site particularly. At this stage the design can accommodate a park or no park depending on which alternative is pursued by the Parks Department. May relocate some second level amenity space if they know location of park.
- The building has no exposure on the south side, other than the light well.
- How big can a building be on the adjacent property?
- Did you look at single-loaded building option?
  - *Applicant response:* This would limit the ability to provide 25% MPDUs.
- If there were a park would we still have discussion? Yes, because there should be building separation or a step-back from the park.
- Woodmont is a canopy corridor, consider additional canopy planting.



- Is it more important to have step-back on south or north? Should there be a choice? Do you think it would be a problem? (One opinion) a full height Tower on the site if there were park would be ok. (Other opinions) Step-back should be on the park if it is provided. You can show an expression through elevation in another way other than step-backs on the north and then provide step-backs on the south.
  - *Applicant response:* Consider that the step-backs are most important on streetscape.
- The treatment of the corners is sensitive in terms of how the building turns corners. It is hard to talk about the building without addressing the south, but as treated with current site configuration there is a wisdom to the treatment.
- If corner cutouts were filled in could you achieve step-backs on the south façade?
  - *Applicant response:* Any shifting will make building bulkier on north
- This can be solved but the design needs to be further explored.
- South façade otherwise working with solid panels, if it is a park it is a whole different discussion.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The following recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report.

1. Public Benefit Points: There was not consensus on whether the project is headed in a direction to achieve 10 public benefit points. The argument against is the building's bulk and massing. Others believed that 10 points is not unreasonable, and if the design can evolve closer to the precedent images and incorporate the following recommendations it may get there.
2. Develop the relationship of the building to the property to the south, if it becomes a park or is redeveloped as a high-rise.
3. Reduce perceived building bulk through step-backs and/or alternative design treatments.
4. Include additional canopy planting along Woodmont Avenue, a canopy corridor.



# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

**FROM:** Laura Shipman  
Design Advisory Panel Liaison

**PROJECT:** Bethesda Gateway  
Plan No. N/A

**DATE:** December 13, 2017

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*The **Bethesda Gateway** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **December 13, 2017**. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel's discussion, and recommendations regarding design excellence and the exceptional design public benefits points. The Panel's recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report and strongly considered by Staff prior to the certification of the Site Plan. Should you have any additional questions and/or comments please feel free to contact the Design Advisory Panel Liaison.*

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Neil Sullivan (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Margaret Rifkin (Director's Office)

Liz Rogers (Attorney, Applicant Team)  
Steven Robins (Attorney, Applicant Team)  
Federico Soifer (Architect, Applicant Team)  
Alisa Rosenberg (Developer, Applicant Team)  
Jon Cleary (Developer, Applicant Team)  
Mike Henehan (Developer, Applicant Team)  
Brad Fox (Civil Engineer, Applicant Team)





## Discussion Points:

- How does circulation work?
  - *Applicant response:* The proposal mimics the drop-off condition of the adjacent building. Pulls cars off of East-West Highway for parking and drop off.
- Recommend 6 feet minimum width to actually plant trees in drop-off planting strip.
- How do you address grade change on the entrance? Is it accessible?
  - *Applicant response:* There will be one entrance at elevation 334, and another at elevation 331. Also, there will be a possible entrance at cellar level.
- Horizontal lines are weakened by verticals on the façade.
- How much are you shifting on each floor plate?
- Can you explain the base? The building emphasizes the non-retail aspect by doing punched windows and a dark façade rather than a truly transparent ground floor and is not as inviting.
- No one walks at this end of East-West Highway.
  - *Applicant response:* Surprisingly there is a lot of pedestrian activity.
- In terms of aesthetics, what is the building trying to do? Why are there two different treatments on the ground floor?
  - *Applicant response:* Trying to provide base for the floors above. Will continue to explore colors and materiality though currently trying to achieve contrast between base and floors above. As we further understand what is happening on the ground floor in terms of uses then the base design will develop.
- The lay by/secondary street feels suburban, should explore other approaches.
- The concept sketch is very successful, the corner of the building faces the street corner. Why has corner shifted to north side of building?
  - *Applicant response:* The corner is still at the corner, but we can play with this and re-orient.
- The precedents that you show are much more aggressive with the corner. The design should create a more aggressive corner treatment.
- Why does the project propose an increase in density from the 1.5 mapped to 9 FAR proposed?
  - *Applicant response:* The proposal is bound by height rather than FAR and can achieve this FAR within the allowable height.
- The through-block connection is indicated in the Bethesda Sector Plan, while physically the garage to the south blocks its implementation now could it happen in the future?
- The long northern elevation feels like a barrier rather than gateway without some kind of gap.
- The adjacent garage site may want to be redeveloped in the future. How do you provide separation from the potential building? Worried about light and air to the south.
  - *Applicant response:* The proposal includes and approximately 10-foot separation currently.
- How does the building meet the building to the west?
  - *Applicant response:* There is a driveway on the eastern portion of the adjacent site.



- Worried about a long uninterrupted wall along east west highway.
- Base treatments need to be resolved.
- Maybe there is a way to add vertical differentiation of the East-West façade rather than just three horizontal zones.
- The shifts offset only three feet, is this so subtle that it almost disappears? The treatment may not be as successful as hoped.
- The three horizontal components could be altered to allow some portion to come down to the ground plane and integrate with the base
- Develop the treatment of the corner.
- The approximately 200-foot wall along East-West Highway is quite long and needs to be broken up if a through block connection cannot be provided.
- Can you tighten the building width and provide open space on the west of the building and perhaps add depth to the North?
  - *Applicant response:* Cannot move building to north because the building cannot cantilever over the right-of-way.
- Be more aggressive with the shifting of planes on the facades.
  - *Applicant response:* This may difficult because we cannot cantilever over the right-of-way.
- This is the entrance and exit from Bethesda. What does this proposal look like coming down Montgomery Avenue?
- Can there be two elevation treatments to break up the scale and peel away layers at center of building to decrease the length of the wall along East-West Highway?
- Continue to explore materials, this will be extremely important.
- Create more hierarchy in the building openings.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The following recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report as conditions of approval.

1. Public Benefit Points: The project is in an initial phase of concept development and has not requested a specific number of Exceptional Design points. The panel commented that the design could get to the minimum 10 Exceptional Design points required in the Bethesda Overlay Zone if it incorporates the following recommendations.
2. Create a more aggressive corner treatment, drawing on the concept sketch and precedents.
3. Resolve the building base and ground floor treatments. Explore lighter building materials and transparency to make a more inviting ground floor.
4. Include more dramatic shifts in the façade planes.
5. Add vertical differentiation of the East-West façade either through a break for a through-block connection or elevation treatments to break up the scale and peel away layers at center of building to decrease the length of the wall.
6. Create more hierarchy in the building openings.
7. Integrate portions of the upper floors with the building base.



