

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

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

**PROJECT:** 8280 Wisconsin Avenue  
Site Plan No. 820180230

**DATE:** September 26, 2018

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*The **8280 Wisconsin Avenue** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **September 26, 2018**. 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)  
Robert Kronenberg (Acting Deputy Director)  
Michael Brown (Area 1 Master Plan Supervisor)  
Grace Bogdan (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Stephanie Dickel (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Matt Folden (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)

Gary Unterberg (Applicant Team)  
Jef Fuller (Applicant Team)  
Evan Weisman (Applicant Team)  
Steve McDaniel (Applicant Team)  
David Cermiglia (Applicant Team)

Naomi Spinrad (Member of the Public)



## Discussion Points:

- What is the gross area of the left vs right? [strict conformance v. proposed design]
  - *Applicant response:* A little smaller on left than right because of step-back.
- Floor plate area of left v right?
  - *Applicant response:* 15,000 sqft on floors on right which is already small, step back takes off about 2,300 sqft.
- We need proof that the floorplate doesn't work. Show us how the labs work at the larger floor plate v smaller.
  - *Applicant response:* We have very small floors and we are trying to maintain the largest floors possible. We thought this was a better design not just maximizing the floor plate. We are trying to address the BRT ROW at the base, and we are trying to balance all of these things. SHA has allowed us to go into the ROW above.
- How did you address concerns about the cantilever?
  - *Applicant response:* We did two things to refine that: retreating the end as a wing almost so you see lightness of façade to make softer. Angled back façade to make softer. Brought the stair back as well.
- Why don't you have abutting properties articulated on the plans? That would help some of your placement and arguments.
- Is it going to be one tenant?
  - *Applicant response:* It will likely be multiple tenants, small and large. The column grid will work well for lab users.
- From what floor to what floor is the cantilever?
  - *Applicant response:* 3,4,5 at that plane and then comes back
- Need to test out street level vegetation to see the impact at street level. Can you bring back the façade to the column grid?
  - *Applicant response:* This will create a shear face if we do not step back and would have a large impact on the design.
- How many feet is the small building from the build to line of your building?
  - *Applicant response:* We are about the same and then 6ft where we pull back
- Does the adjacent building abut your building? There is a concern about the lengths of the loading docks and congestion.



- *Applicant response:* Yes, right on the property line. We answered all the technical questions about turning radii. It is a policing issue, where trucks will stop on the street. In the Site Plan application, we put in a loading dock management plan to enforce ourselves.
- What are the materials?
  - *Applicant response:* Stone along the base and then a screen at the top with a filigree feeling to it. Glass at lower levels as clear as possible and glass above will have tinting for solar.
- I like what you are doing in terms of use.
- This does not meet guidelines, specifically step back guidelines. The building is quite busy and could be simpler if you pushed back the cantilever. Would be a more elegant if it was simpler and more cohesive.
- The podium is more defined, this is an important line. I'm not disagreeing about set back especially since you are like the 4<sup>th</sup> in row to do this. If you were the first you might have gotten away with it.
- It needs simplicity to be cohesive. It is trying too hard.
- I wonder why you decided to introduce the glass panel instead of continuing rhythm.
- As far as setback is concerned, the substantial canopy and the two-level cantilever makes more of an emphasis on the entrance, along with the canopy installation is better than many we have seen up to this point. This is not a skyscraper tower, it is a modest building, allows this building to project. Personally, looking at the guidelines setback I find this to be a much more interesting building. The cantilever is mitigated vertically.
- The canopy helps because it is masking the cantilever above it. I agree that you have lost something from the first presentation. The other one held together more, this is very episodic, the other submission held together holistically. (No, after looking at the old submission I change my mind).
- The west façade has discipline.
- I think they worked well with staff on refinements since the first.
  - *Applicant response:* The big change is on the west side. The real change here is there is subtlety.
- The horizontal white lines are more pronounced.



- The north façade may not need to be as busy and episodic.
- I think the north bay window works well, but what is on the left is too busy, would prefer to see more glass. The old scheme the façade was more cohesive. Need more simplification, elegance and less fragmentation.
- There might be a time when folks will look back on the irregular window patterns and want to return to a more regular grid
  - *Applicant response:* We can tone this down and create a strong language and the rest becomes a backdrop.
- We need to get to the cantilever issue. We need to have a definitive answer.
- I appreciate the diagram for strict coherence. I'm ok with the variation from the guidelines, I think 13,000 sf would be much to small a floor plate. I think this is a well-designed project and alternative treatment is ok.
- I can't accept a cantilever this large. Pulling back the façade I think I like the gesture, but I think its token.
- I think the varying height of cantilever is positive.
- We need to respect design guidelines, we do not want to set precedent for other applicants coming in.
- It's a shame that this building followed other buildings were not nearly as successful, and that's why the term cantilevers r-us. I like this building. I am conflicted.
- Shouldn't we look at each project on its own merits.
- We want the guidelines to be followed in a way that is positive, I do believe this project should stand on its own, politics aside.
- If this was one of the first projects to come to the committee it would have gone through. I think the project does a good job of breaking down the heights along Wisconsin.
- *Vote Discussion:* During the vote the panel was initially split on whether to support the project as presented because of the large cantilever. A panel member proposed that the applicant reduce the cantilever from 8 feet to 4 feet, and the applicant offered to accept this compromise to garner the full support of the panel.



### **Panel Recommendations:**

The following recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report.

1. Create more simplification, elegance and less fragmentation on the facades, particularly the north façade.
2. Public Benefit Points: Four of the panel members support the requested 25 exceptional design points. One notes they could get to 25 points but are currently at 15 or 20 points.
3. Vote:
  - **1** in support
  - **4** in support but with conditions to incorporate the panel recommendation above. Two of these panel members have an additional condition to reduce the cantilever from 8 feet to 4 feet to make the cantilever less imposing.



# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

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

**PROJECT:** 7607 Old Georgetown Road  
Site Plan No. 8201900300

**DATE:** September 26, 2018

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*The **7607 Old Georgetown Road** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **September 26, 2018**. 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)  
Gwen Wright (Planning Director)  
Robert Kronenberg (Acting Deputy Director)  
Grace Bogdan (Lead Reviewer)  
Stephanie Dickel (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Matt Folden (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)

David Judd (Applicant Team)  
Daryl South (Applicant Team)  
Janel Kausner (Applicant Team)  
Robert Sponseller (Applicant Team)  
Geoff Lawson (Applicant Team)  
Kevin Johnson (Applicant Team)  
Matt Gordon (Applicant Team)  
Bob Dalrymple (Applicant Team)  
Naomi Spinrad (Member of the Public)



## Discussion Points:

- The couple of trees matches the trees across the street?
  - *Applicant response:* Yes, they match the ginkgo trees across the street. Because of the access issues along Commerce we placed them together.
- The big monumental opening on the east side on the base what is that?
  - *Applicant response:* It will be a terrace, an “urban porch”
- Do you know which façade treatment you prefer?
  - *Applicant response:* No, we are required to do at least 8 inches recess by code, and not sure if we will do more.
- It is the detail that sets the building apart, if you do the “outies” it adds detail on the façade.
- I think it’s a really elegant building. I think the improvements are quite nice.
- You show two plaza connection options. How will you address accessibility?
  - *Applicant response:* Accessibility is not required. The two plaza connection options are if we only access on the property we control as opposed to reaching over into the plaza. Two other entry points provide accessibility to the plaza.
- How will you make the ventilation shaft wall element less oppressive?
  - *Applicant response:* There are existing trees there today to screen and we will use a material that will blend with the building architecture.
- I know accessibility is not required, but for families and others needing assistance it is a good thing to have.
- Having the entrance to the building off of the plaza is really great.
- As expected the project has come out beautifully.
- How are you screening the mechanical penthouse and how does it relate to skin of building?
  - *Applicant response:* We are running the skin up instead of differentiating. The openings are for air flow, and below they are windows, and the deep coffering creates an interesting architectural moment.
- So, the tall element is a checkerboard plaid?
  - *Applicant response:* The openings repeat but it is two different openings. The openings on the west are driven by unit types and outdoor space



- It seems forced with the ABAB window pattern. It seems you need some regular to play the irregular against. I would create more regular.
- I like subtlety of the movement of ABAB. It gives a very nice quality and shadows.
- Of the three façade options either the middle or right are preferable to left. The advantage of the right is you can cast shadow on brick as opposed to shadow on glass. The one on the left becomes very dull and a very tall building on a small site, the texture on the façade is very important.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The following recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report.

1. Of the three façade options either the middle or right are preferable.
2. Consider providing accessible access directly from the building to the plaza.
3. Public Benefit Points: All of the panel members support the requested 30 exceptional design points noting that this building is an example and shows real care to meeting the spirit of the design guidelines.
4. Vote: **5** in support



# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

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

**PROJECT:** St. Elmo Apartments  
Sketch Plan No. 32015004A

**DATE:** September 26, 2018

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*The **St. Elmo Apartments** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **September 26, 2018**. 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)  
Paul Mortensen (Panelist, Senior Urban Designer in the Director's Office)  
*Qiaojue Yu (Panelist) RECUSED*

Laura Shipman (Design Advisory Panel Liaison)  
Gwen Wright (Planning Director)  
Robert Kronenberg (Deputy Director)  
Mark Pfefferle (Interim Chief Area 1)  
Grace Bogdan (Lead Reviewer)  
Stephanie Dickel (Planner Coordinator, Area 1)

Nancy Bassing (Applicant Team)  
Becky May (Applicant Team)  
Steve Cook (Applicant Team)  
Mark Elliott (Applicant Team)  
Craig Williams (Applicant Team)  
David Schwarz (Applicant Team)  
Steve Robbins (Applicant Team)  
Naomi Spinrad (Member of the Public)



## Discussion Points:

*This is the second Design Advisory Panel meeting for St. Elmo Apartments to review the Sketch Plan application. Notes and recommendations from the previous meeting on April 4, 2018 are also attached. This meeting focused on the specific issues along the through-block connection including tower separation, cantilever and balconies.*

- There needs to be air and light between buildings, and view to the sky. There is not enough separation. I don't mind how tight the space is at pedestrian level, but how tight it is on the upper floors.
- You have two buildings with very long faces and it makes the separation more critical. These are not point towers.
- If you meet the guidelines, what would happen? What is the reason that is not working?
  - *Applicant response:* You would lose the FAR that was gained, and we would return to the other approved building. It just brings up the question of if you like this building or the previous scheme. You also can't slide the elevators 10 feet, the parking would not work.
- I don't understand why you can't re-look at this, and you could make the garage plan work. I do think this project is better than the one approved previously.
- What was the FAR of the previous design?
  - *Applicant response:* We are adding 50,000 sf. If we drop below that then construction costs would prohibit going higher. You can't slide the building then the windows would not work. We have worked with the Bainbridge. They are a part of this approval and request, they are not objecting to the approval.
- The changes were good on the balconies, that was a successful exercise.
- I think alternating balconies from closed to open is a bad idea. This is not an improvement. Should be more consistent. We could nitpick the other details of the building but I'm still concerned about light and air of the two buildings. It's like putting lipstick on a pig, liked other balconies.
- The building is ok but the separation is too tight. If you had just gone up and stepped back. The building itself is a fine building but you should have more separation.
- I don't have a problem with the narrow alley I have a problem with the building face to building face above. At our last meeting we blindly accepted some caveats like stair tower and parking, we should have said that is not our problem, figure it out.



- The 70 ft up 5 ft closer is a horrible option.
- The other project would not be as good of a project, because it is closer to the Bainbridge. If the project is a few feet greater would it really make a difference? Would I prefer to see more distance yes, but I defer to David on whether that would be good architecture.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The following recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report.

1. The panel is split on the issue of tower separation and whether the upper floors should step back along the through-block connection. Two would like to see the team push back the building a minimum of 10-15 feet to meet the Design Guidelines tower separation distance. Whereas two other panel members do not think this will make enough of an impact to be worthwhile for the applicant.
2. The panel is split on whether the current balcony design is successful. One does not think the alternating railing design is positive and they should be more uniform.
3. Public Benefit Points: Two panel members believe the project is on track to achieve at least the minimum 10 Exceptional Design points required in the Bethesda Overlay Zone. One panel member thinks the architecture is ok but thinks we don't want to set a precedent and we need to pay closer attention to the design guidelines. One panel member did not have enough resolution of the issues raised to say.
4. Straw vote: **2** in support, **2** in support but with conditions (greater tower separation, at least an additional 10-15 feet), **0** do not support, **1** recused.



# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

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

**PROJECT:** St Elmo Apartments  
Sketch Plan No. 32015004A

**DATE:** April 4, 2018

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*The **St Elmo Apartments** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **April 4, 2018**. 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, recused)

Laura Shipman (Design Advisory Panel Liaison)  
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)  
Matt Folden (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Grace Bogdan (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Stephanie Dickel (Area 1 Planner Coordinator)  
Atul Sharma (Area 2 Planner Coordinator)

Bill Landfair (Engineer/Planner, Applicant Team)  
Elliot Rhodeside (Landscape Architect, Applicant Team)  
Craig Williams (Architect, Applicant Team)  
David Schwarz (Architect, Applicant Team)  
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Steve Robbins (Attorney, Applicant Team)  
Naomi Spinrad (Member of the Public)  
Amanda Farber (Member of the Public)

### Discussion Points:

- Public Comments:
  - Thank you for the physical model.
  - The promenade and cantilever feel like a tunnel.
    - *Applicant response:* There are 20 feet before the cantilever, so it is high enough and provides spatial definition and there are no columns. We don't have spaces like this in Montgomery County because we have not built cities. You come from a wider street into compression and intimacy, like in Chicago or New York. Once a building is 10 stories it doesn't matter how tall the building is because eyes don't perceive it.
  - West side what happens when the next building comes up next door?
    - *Applicant response:* The windows on the courtyard are sufficient. The next project will have to assemble and will then be able to provide enough separation.
  - Love the sculpture, is there lighting around?
    - *Applicant response:* As the sun moves the facets are lit, at night there are stationary lights that provide a glow. Catenary lights above provide lighting and human scale.
- Terrific presentation, it helped us understand the thought process.
- The scale of the straight wall on the promenade is an issue, would suggest stepping back upper floors, but understand it would reduce units.
  - *Applicant response:* The site is quite constrained and wouldn't make the height worthwhile economically. Bringing building down to the street and anchoring building is a creative way of doing building for richer design. Do not want to make it feel like the building is sideways to the street.
- Remarkable presentation, great precedents. Don't have problem with architecture and massing, but separation between buildings is tight. Design guidelines call for 45-60ft.
- Did you consider pulling in long arm of courtyard on other side 10 feet to allow more separation on Bainbridge side?



- *Applicant response:* Did look at sliding the bar, but by eroding corners it allowed views. No question that the center of Bainbridge will be impacted. Need to have corners where they are to get the FAR and make the building economically viable. We looked at views from Bainbridge units, and in each case there is a wider angle of view than the previous approved scheme. Looked at solar angles, no question that there is impact, but it is a wash. Net result is that the new design is better at morning and afternoon, not as good during the day when most aren't home. Sliding the building 5ft makes minimal difference on impact to Bainbridge. Given this site and guidelines this is the most responsible design we can come up with. Most important issue is impact on units, and impact is better than the existing approved building, which is closer.
- Balconies add mass, without some of them do you have better building? Particularly on the promenade façade because they add bulk to the parts of the façade. They project and are distracting. Would it help to make projections less bulky with less balconies, many on upper floors may not use the balconies so much.
  - *Applicant response:* You would have a less articulate building. Don't care as much about center unit balconies, but many of these are MPDUs and would make these units less nice which is a philosophical problem. Could make balcony edges rails to be more transparent.
- The presentation was extraordinary, but the only weak point is the separation. The suspended light between the buildings, peaks of sun and quality of materials and general shade and comfort make the promenade work much better than what you see. Tight space even if you pull the building back. Losing the balconies probably won't impact the tight space, rails may work but may not make much impact.
  - *Applicant response:* If you have greater glass area need something to mitigate the large sheer wall. That is the role of the balconies.
- Concern about cantilever and how that makes the pedestrian feel? How can you minimize the area of it popping out?
- The tower wants to have its own integrity, concern about the reading of what is tower. Find it disturbing that plane doesn't come down to the ground along the promenade.
- Different opinions on separation but otherwise very supportive of the building.



**Panel Recommendations:**

The following recommendations should be incorporated into the Staff Report.

1. Public Benefit Points: The project is on track to achieve at least the minimum 10 Exceptional Design points required in the Bethesda Overlay Zone.
2. Explore how to further improve the pedestrian experience along the promenade and reduce the bulk and imposing feeling of the cantilever, balconies and large sheer wall. While some panel members suggested tower step-backs and increased tower separation may help, others stated that these small moves may not have a large impact.

