

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

FROM: Laura Shipman
Design Advisory Panel Liaison

PROJECT: Battery Lane District
Sketch Plan No. TBD

DATE: March 27, 2019

*The **Battery Lane District** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on **March 27, 2019**. 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.*

Attendance:

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

Laura Shipman (Design Advisory Panel Liaison)
Robert Kronenberg (Deputy Director)
Elza Hisel-McCoy (Area 1 Regulatory Supervisor)
Grace Bogdan (Area 1 Lead Reviewer)
Rachel Newhouse (Parks Department)
Hyojung Garland (Parks Department)

Robert Graham (Applicant Team)
Gary Unterberg (Applicant Team)
Iffat Afsana (Applicant Team)
Jef Fuller (Applicant Team)
David Kitchens (Applicant Team)
Tom Donagby (Applicant Team)
Ben Kishimoto (Applicant Team)
Sheena Gozon (Applicant Team)
Zach Pawlos (Applicant Team)



Artie Harris (Applicant Team)
Doug Wrenn (Applicant Team)
Kim Centrone (Applicant Team)
Nancy Regelin (Applicant Team)
Anthony Falcone (Applicant Team)

Holly Clemans (Member of the Public)
Michael Fetchko (Member of the Public)
Kevie Nilanv (Member of the Public)
Eileen O'Connor (Member of the Public)
Naomi Spinrad (Member of the Public)
Ellen Witt (Member of the Public)

Discussion Points:

- Phasing, which phase is first? What is the logic?
 - *Applicant response:* Site A first, E second, C third, D fourth, B last. The phasing responds to the aging condition of buildings, some are in good condition and can last longer. We are engaging with the PLD and would like to see where those discussions go regarding the parking garage south of Site B. Incremental replacement of units allows relocation of existing residents while redeveloping.
- There are two buildings that you left in this area, correct?
 - *Applicant response:* There is a building on Wisconsin and a building on Old Georgetown that will remain. There is about a 30% turnover for relocation.
- Have you thought about B and C as one site, to create a continuous façade?
 - *Applicant response:* We have had a lot of discussions about this being a residential district vs a commercial district. In a commercial district you do not want missing teeth, but in a residential area we want more breathing room, and more of a neighborhood avenue than commercial district.
- You talk about Battery Lane more as a residential boulevard, then what makes Battery Lane unique vs say Woodmont Avenue? I ask because the street type is identified in the guidelines, and clearly the sidewalk right on the curb is not something we want to see. We do however want to see the front lawns, so maybe it is more of a pedestrian strolling street with wider setbacks. Should you give more room in the fronts to create a character for battery lane that is more of a boulevard with more trees? Your fly through model shows the buildings right up close to the street which is jarring.
 - *Applicant response:* All of the buildings are within 20-25ft setback recommended, we are bringing buildings up to the street. The drop-off between B and C is a unique moment. We have occasional setbacks for lobbies and breaks for midblock



connections and the loop road. We are also providing stoops on the street. Everything to the east is the Bethesda streetscape (brick and tree panel), everything to the west is a concrete sidewalk to transition to existing sidewalks. What is the right dimension from the curb? We are staying within the 20-25 feet and bringing buildings up to the street.

- I'm not sure the 25 ft setback is right, or if there should be more space.
 - *Applicant response:* We thought about whether the building should be more asymmetrical, creating variation in the build-to line and green areas at the front. When the pedestrian walks around the corner from Woodmont we want them to exhale and feel like it is something different.
 - *Staff comment:* what is missing here is one vision for the entire street, all other projects that are not a part of the project will be looking to you to set the tone. This is the most important thing that the sketch plan should do. You need one design approach from Woodmont to Old Georgetown Road.
- You talk about sharing amenity spaces, can this also apply to parking? Also, for MPDUs does each building have to have 25% MPDUs or can the whole project have 25%?
 - *Applicant response:* The parking is 0.67 for each unit, the project is ½ mile from each metro station and not within PLD.
- If you pinch the opening of battery lane right off of Woodmont, you could then expand the street and open up. I agree that you should have one drawing of the entire street so that all developments that come in could play nicely.
 - *Applicant response:* Making it a bit tighter is intentional to create a less suburban ratio.
- You could create a transition east to west from a single to double row of trees
 - *Applicant response:* As you notice there are the urban brick sidewalks and then moving along we create tree panels. I am hearing that we should create the transition farther east?
- What is wrong with the street today is that the street is too wide and undefined, so don't get too far away from creating a street wall, which does provide comfort for pedestrians.
- When I think of residential, I do think that a significant tree canopy and planted surface is important. The sidewalks can be narrower, and the planted area could be wider.
- I haven't heard much about the park. It is a unique amenity that this area has, it is unfortunate that the two buildings along it are not going away to improve the visibility and access to the park.



- Instead of trying to make the entire district interesting, you should create nodes every 2-300 feet to create interest along the street. I am not sure that the drop-off is the best node. A sequence of events can be very positive. (*After further thought, the panelist recommends nodes every 500 to 800 feet apart*).
- I want to commend you for showing the existing street views in the video.
- I think this could be a garden district that differentiates itself from the urban areas.
- I live in this area and there are a good amount of people using the trail as commuters, as exercise and for families.
- Is there an opportunity to integrate some neighborhood retail?
 - *Applicant response:* Yes, we plan to include coffee shop or bike repair shop as neighborhood serving retail.
- I would not show the park with the sidewalks right up against the street, include a double row of trees along the park to have the sidewalks inboard, even if you do not have control of all of the properties.
 - *Parks Staff:* The more an open space is exposed to the street, the more it is utilized. So, if the open space on Site D along the trail is hidden from the street and separated it will not be as well used. Understanding that you have a requirement to create light and air for the building, create adjacent relationships and symbiotic relationships between the open spaces.
 - *Applicant response:* The Site D rendering omits the proposed area of trees that could also be an amenity.
- There are a lot of big moves that I am not seeing but I would like to see. How does site D contribute to the entire district? I am not as interested in trying to lower the entire building but rather how you relate to the adjacent buildings. I think then you should maximize height to get the maximum amenity.
- On Site D, it is a nice public space for the building but not for the whole street. Why not have the buildings facing onto the park and pulling back the buildings so the park becomes wider and public, becoming more of a park and not just a trail. The building could still have the same amount of density and fill out the envelope rather than facing inward.
 - *Applicant response:* We need to do more work to create moments and pockets along Battery Lane and along the trail, we can look more at this. Tight and open spaces could work similar to the Highline. This is not necessarily an insular park as has been problematic.
 - *Parks Staff:* Look at the urban greenway concept diagrams and photos in the sector plan and guidelines for guidance for Site D.



- *Applicant response:* We started with a wide green space, and the building was one dense mass. If we create a building within the height guidelines it becomes a massive building. We wanted to break up the mass. We could look at adjusting the step-back above the podium.
- I am curious why you chose to have townhouses facing the park?
 - *Applicant response:* We are balancing many things, in this venue we are talking about urban design. But in the plan there is a discussion of affordability. So we want to have the broadest range of housing types to allow affordability. It is not townhouses it is 2-story liner units on the parking garage with stick built above. We could turn the building around but the current orientation allows views and is designed for solar orientation.
- If you could go to 120 and create a 1 or 2-acre park extension of the trail rather than limiting height.
 - *Applicant response:* We still have the consideration of the affordable housing type. The lower building also allows the condo residents to have a view through the site. The massing is intended to be sympathetic with a midrise building along battery lane and high-rise to the rear to relate to NIH.
- We need to first think about the urban design that would make it an overall urban neighborhood.
- If its possible you could eliminate the low-rise building on Site D and reallocate on other sites.
 - *Applicant response:* We have highrise concrete building types which are expensive, light concrete, and stick built for affordability.
- Could you create a street along C connecting to Rugby instead of a loop road?
 - *Applicant response:* The PUD and the sector plan removed the street connection, we could facilitate that occurring.
- Site B has the clearest massing.
- Site D why do a stepped terrace? There is a concern about accessibility.
- On Site C could one of the connections be pedestrian rather than having a vehicular loop all the way around?
 - *Applicant response:* We are at the start of a 10-year journey and will be returning for site plan for each building.



- In looking at all the precedent images for all the buildings, there are some that I like and others less so. You want some qualities that are similar, we would not need a pattern book. An urban design drawing is needed, there could also be a pattern book about the materials that could be used to tie it all together showing the materials that each architect can choose from.
 - *Applicant response:* We are having design progress meetings every 3 weeks and are trying to create buildings that are cousins, similar but not too similar.
- This worries me, this seems like form-based code and could get too similar. Massing consistency is important but guidelines that create too much similarity can be a problem.
- Site D, why isn't your high-rise where the low-rise is and the low-rise in the back? I understand that NIH and the open space is compelling, but it does something dramatic for views to Battery Lane Park and NIH to have the high-rise along Battery Lane.
- A lot of the examples shown here are all glass, is this an all glass neighborhood? That is why I suggested something of a 2-page pattern book.
 - *Applicant response:* Phasing will help, each architect will respond to the design of the previous architect. All glass is not what we are suggesting particularly with the socioeconomics proposed. Brick will be a primary material.
- I would not shy away from density and height, unless building technology restricts. You have a lot of open space, wide streets and light and air so you could maximize the build-out.
- But would you say that if it reduces the potential number of MPDUs? No of course not.

Panel Recommendations:

The project will return to the panel prior to Planning Board review of the Sketch Plan to focus on the urban design of the district, and the massing and open space design on site D. The following are initial recommendations.

1. Provide an urban design vision for the entire street from Woodmont Avenue to Old Georgetown Road. Incorporate opportunities for deeper setbacks, increased canopy trees and plantings to create a garden district that differentiates itself from the more urban areas in downtown Bethesda.
2. Widen the public open space on site D, the North Bethesda Trail Urban Greenway, as recommended in the Bethesda Downtown Plan. Create a better visual and physical connection between Battery Lane Urban Park and the NIH public open space.



3. Reconfigure the massing and orientation of the buildings on site D to relate to the widened public open space along the Bethesda Trolley Trail. Consider reducing the footprint and increasing the height of the midrise building along Battery Lane.
4. Create a brief pattern book or selection of materials to provide cohesion for the multiple projects in the district. Make sure to avoid excessive homogeneity while aiming to provide consistency.
5. Consider making one of the connections on site C pedestrian-only rather than having a vehicular loop around the site. In addition, study the feasibility of a street connection through site C from Battery Lane to Rugby Avenue.

