

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

FROM: Grace Bogdan
Planner Coordinator

PROJECT: 4702 West Virginia Avenue

DATE: 11/20/2019

The 4702 West Virginia Avenue project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on 11/20/2019. 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:

Panel Members

Karl Du Puy
George Dove
Damon Orobona
Rod Henderer

Staff

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Director
Elza Hisel-McCoy, Area 1 Division Chief
Stephanie Dickel, Area 1 Regulatory Supervisor
Grace Bogdan, Lead Reviewer

Applicant Team

Bob Dalrymple, Linowes and Blocher
Matt Gordon, Linowes and Blocher
Jason Weinstein, Broad Branch Development
Shane Crawly, Broad Branch Development
Dennis Connors, SKI
Pat Lavay, MHG

Members of the Public

Jim Manuel



Paige Nerenberg
Marge Smith
Mary Rubino
Marty Jul

Discussion Points:

- Big improvement from the previous massing. Do you have the previous elevation from the west side?
 - *Applicant Response:* No, it wasn't developed at that time and was one of the tasks to do at site plan. Current western elevation has the opportunity to be dramatic in terms of materials. Applicants have tried to work with MCDOT to create a grander vision for redevelopment of the parking lot but those efforts have not been successful
- The parking lot façade really lacks aesthetically, compared to the other three facades. How does the interior unit look? Is there a ground floor unit? It seems pretty grim and lacking natural light.
 - *Applicant Response:* The units are long and narrow. We tried to make as many as we can, the units aren't reliant on the windows on the west side rather relying on the main façade. The windows that are there are 'at risk' meaning if the neighboring property develops the window may need to be removed or be blocked by the adjacent building, but the units are not reliant on those windows.
- Considering the Master Plan recommendation, is it still needing to be considered as a structure? Also, the western façade is the most seen from Wisconsin Ave and it seems like a lost opportunity that it isn't nicer
 - *Applicant Response:* The building has been designed with many contingents based on future development, such as the at-risk windows.
- Can you talk about the unit entries that were proposed at sketch plan level to be on the eastern and southern side and why those entries were removed?
 - *Applicant Response:* It is now a much more traditional multifamily based on market conditions, research, and neighborhood consensus. They were too big, too vertical for the Bethesda today. So the unit plan layout does not work if they have a front door based on internal access (bedroom cannot be at front door) etc
- So who uses that alley now? Seems you may want to set aside a couple feet for a walkway
 - *Applicant Response:* Nobody, it is currently fenced right now
- I can understand why the alley isn't utilized, as it doesn't get you anywhere in the current condition
 - *Applicant Response:* We think of it more now as visually blending into the park
- So the pathway along the eastern side remains? Perhaps the full 10 foot is not necessary
 - *Applicant Response:* Correct, it remains, however is no longer raised as previously proposed. It will connect West Virginia to the Park and also serve as fire access



and resident access to the single entry. It will be about 5 feet of sidewalk and 5 feet of landscape/stormwater

- The trees that are along the eastern side do not exist? Very important to show which trees are under the Applicant's control rather than offsite vision, which properly show the proposed landscaping along the property frontage and the pathway
 - That is correct, and they are offsite, only conceptually placed as a future condition for the greenway. Will clarify with site plan submittal
- Can you update us on the attempts for purchasing the neighboring property? It is a good project but there is a major concern that if that property does not join the project then it will never fully develop. The building could be much better with a larger footprint and greatly improve the western side.
 - There is a disconnect in terms of value and they are not motivated to sell. We are trying to enlist help from others to encourage their motivation to sell. The Parks Department could purchase the lot utilizing PIP funds, but it could never redevelop
- All of the elevations have significantly improved, however still very concerned about the western elevation facing the parking lot side.
- Moving forward, if there are opportunities to increase the wood paneling and minimizing the darkness on the western façade. Is there any way to create indents for the wood paneling?
 - There isn't much opportunity due to the depth, but maybe just adding a couple inches is possible
- There is a discrepancy between the elevation and rendering, two windows are missing from the rendering
 - You are correct, the elevation is correct which shows two additional windows
- Is DPS allowing at risk windows
 - Yes, for certain projects such as this one and another project in Kensington where the project is facing a county parking lot

Public Comment

- Adequate parking? Where will the overflow go?
 - An application is not submitted yet. The parking will need to meet the requirements, and are proposing 16 spaces which is above the minimum requirement.
- Applicant has been great and very engaging, appreciate the redesign, but are very concerned about the parking lot elevation as it is so visible. The existing green will be coming down and will be left with the big dark wall which is higher than 35' considering mechanical/penthouse. Also concerned about the east side facing the house with maintenance concerns and there are no sidewalks currently and have CEPTED concerns
- A little concerned about the mass bearing down on the street
 - On the site plan show the existing condition of the offsite area so it can be reviewed

Panel Recommendations:

The following recommendation should be incorporated into the Staff Report.



1. Public Benefit Points: The Applicant is requesting 20 Exceptional Design points, the Panel votes 4 in support, with the following conditions.
 - a. Further develop the western façade facing the County parking lot through increase of wood paneling and adding depth, of even a couple inches, and minimizing the darkness of materials
 - b. Properly reflect on site plan only landscaping that is under control and maintenance by the Applicant. Do not include landscaping that is offsite and not in control by the Applicant.

