

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: 8015 Old Georgetown Road
Site Plan No. 820200130

DATE: January 22, 2020

The 8015 Old Georgetown Road project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on January 22, 2020. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel's discussion, and recommendations regarding design excellence and the exceptional design public benefits points. The Applicant must revise the design consistent with the comments, for review at Site Plan by Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Designer. 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

Karl Du Puy

George Dove

Damon Orobona

Rod Henderer

Qiaojue Yu

Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Designer in the Director's Office

Staff

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Director

Elza Hisel-McCoy, Area 1 Division Chief

Stephanie Dickel, Area 1 Regulatory Supervisor

Grace Bogdan, Lead Reviewer

Matt Folden, Transportation Planner

Applicant Team

Erin Girard, Attorney

Dennis Connors, SKI Architects

John Graham

Members of the Public

Dedun Ingram



Alexandra Kosmides

Discussion Points:

General Comments

- Do like the Old Georgetown Road frontage, articulation has come a long way, and improvements on the back for stepping down, but the corner at Old Georgetown Road and Glenbrook is peculiar; understand the need for a chamfer but the vertical treatment may work better behind the glass.
- Appreciate the floor plan identifying the MPDUs, and distribution of units.
- The improvement along the back (stepbacks) will improve the relationship with the neighborhood.
- Can you discuss the ground floor entrances with the change in grade?
 - *Applicant Response: Main entrance at corner of Old Georgetown Road and Glenbrook, additional entrance on Old Georgetown Road mid-block. Entrances off Glenbrook, but no entrances from courtyard area. Ground floor parking garage and bike storage bury into first floor at access road.*
- So to get to the lobby from the through block connection at the NW you'd have to go to the corner? It seems like a labyrinth for residents, why not have two entrances?
 - *Applicant Response: That's right, unless you entered through the parking garage. We intended to centralize amenity space to encourage a sense of community.*
- What is the height and material of the retaining wall?
 - *Applicant Response: About 4.5 feet.*
- What is the dark brown material? No stucco?
 - *Applicant Response: Combination of metals, no stucco. There will be a bit of articulation along Old Georgetown Road frontage.*

Corner Treatment

- The white material does not seem to center so it frames one side and the other is off. Not quite there yet, the blade walls help break down the verticality, but the corner treatment is not there yet functionally and aesthetically.
- Ground floor unit shares the corner at Old Georgetown Road, which is odd. It should all be amenity or all unit, seems odd to celebrate an entrance as shared unit ground floor living. The scale seems off.
- Perhaps there needs to be some relationship between façade around the corner to acknowledge the setback.
- Perhaps the way of solving this is grounding the white as you did on Glenbrook
 - *Applicant Response: That relationship was to connect with the neighborhood, may not achieve the same look on Old Georgetown Road.*



Design Guidelines Street Design

- How does this relate to the street type and setbacks? There does seem to be a deep shadow along the street? The paneling of the balconies make it seem like the entire first floor is setback rather than equal or stepping out, its recessed.
 - *Applicant Response: Old Georgetown Road is neighborhood connector, base height 3-5 and stepback of 15-20, neighborhood local 2-4 base height and stepback of 15-20 feet. Rather than stepping back, it projects.*
- How far are you setback from curb?
 - *Applicant Response: 25 feet from curb to base, projections for balconies are 5 feet.*
- So it appears the whole elevation is projecting. It becomes very apparent with the base diagrams that the whole first floor is in shadow, which may be an issue with the Planning Board and it should be addressed why you are doing that or why it is not meeting the Design Guidelines. If it was just balconies it is one thing, but the panels create overhangs which the Planning Board has made clear they will not support. As shown now is problematic.
 - *Applicant Response: The scale of this building is smaller, at 85 feet, the balconies with panels layer the façade and diminish the mass. The reading of base, middle, top is there while not traditional, its distinguished. Exposed balconies along Old Georgetown Road are not going to be aesthetically pleasing.*
- Agree with the layers helping diminish, however the base being recessed is still a problem What is the base height?
 - *Applicant Response: The shadow may be off, 20 feet tall base height.*
- Why 20 feet on the base?
 - *Applicant Response: Since the project is on the fringe, the building will have more of a hospitality feel, so the entrance will be more of an experience rather than just an entrance.*
- Given Applicant's explanation, what they are proposing on Old Georgetown Road is the right design, the two-story amenity space and connections are the right scale, it is highly articulated and meets the alternative materials criteria in the Design Guidelines.
- Articulation in two-dimension drawing is very nice, base and top, the middle creates a strong horizontal, but this base setback needs to be addressed in the Project's Statement of Justification and why it works for this project.
 - *Applicant Response: Understood*
- The range in setback allowed by the DG would mean that it conforms, the elements you are using with the plane changes are very helpful.



Glenbrook frontage

- The setback in the guidelines would result in a 15-20 foot after the base.
 - *Applicant Response: We focused the design on the additional setback from the residential rather than fronting Glenbrook as the opposite side of the street is commercial.*
- So the thickness of the panel and materials would allow the visual change? What is the thickness?
 - *Applicant Response: 4 inches, the angle of the street makes it look like more*
- Need to focus the SOJ explicitly address why that decision was made there
 - *Applicant Response: Understood.*

Public Comment

Alexandra Komisades, City Commons of Bethesda resident

- Generally in support of project but disappointed in the design as it reads more of a suburban office design rather than a residential building, were hoping for more texture particularly along Glenbrook. The bright white masonry should be toned down and the aging of the color may not be nice. Concerned about the through block connection being accessible and want to be sure the gate through to the fire site will be accessible.
 - *Applicant Response: There is currently a gate, so we refer to that area as the gate, but it is always open.*

Panel Recommendations:

The following recommendation should be incorporated into the Staff Report.

1. Public Benefit Points: The Applicant is requesting 20, the Panel supports a maximum of 15 (based on staff's review of improvements) Exceptional Design points, the Panel votes 5 in support, with the following conditions.
 - a. Corner treatment recommendations to be reviewed by Staff, which may determine whether it needs to return to the DAP
 - b. Direction on corner treatment:
 - Seems to be ambivalence between building entrance and the unit location on the ground floor which is a real problem. Should communicate more as domestic rather than office.
 - Is there an opportunity to inset or project one to emphasize entrance? The blade wall isn't enough and the blade wall on the right side reads very different than the left, but the solid plane glass could be manipulated. Perhaps more detail, with window character?

