

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: 4725 Cheltenham Drive

DATE: May 27, 2020

The 4725 Cheltenham Drive project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on May 27, 2020. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel's discussion, recommendations regarding design excellence, and the exceptional design public benefits points. The project is in the Sketch Plan stage and will need to return to the Design Advisory Panel at the time of Site Plan to review comments provided and determine final vote for design excellence. 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

Gwen Wright, Director
Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Director
Elza Hisel-McCoy, Area 1 Division Chief
Stephanie Dickel, Area 1 Regulatory Supervisor
Grace Bogdan, Planner Coordinator
Rachel Newhouse, Parks Staff
Hyojung Garland, Parks Staff
Dominic Quattrocchi, Parks Staff
Dominique Neam, IT Staff
Emily Balmer, Area 1 Principal Administrative Assistant

Applicant Team

Steve Robins, Attorney
Liz Rodgers, Attorney
Devon Hastie, Bozzuto (Developer)
Jeff Kayce, Bozzuto (Developer)
Shawn Stadler, Architect



Sungjin Cho, Architect
Josh Sloan, VIKA
Charles Crislip, VIKA
Robert Tilson, VIKA

Members of the Public
Amanda Farber
Stephen Long

Discussion Points:

General Comments

- What Stage of review is this?
 - *Staff Response: Submitting shortly for Sketch Plan, so focus on massing, views, relationship to the park, high level of conformance to design guidelines and design excellence.*
- Can you review the party wall treatments to the west of the property?
 - *Applicant Response: Right now we are on the property line so we cannot have any windows, we anticipate a building going up in the near future so we are looking at other methods to enliven that façade such as material changes and articulation.*
- Previously we requested a section through the property and into the Cheltenham Park to show the existing slope moving across the alley into the park. Disappointed that all the exhibits look relatively flat knowing the existing condition is otherwise. That detail is going to be very important as how it is handled with the relationship to the park and those using the park.
 - *Applicant Response: Apologize for not providing, we can certainly provide that. The fence has recently been repaired and has extended along the Park property line, we tried to address the relationship with specialty paving to signal that the Alley is more than an Alley, rather a front of the Project.*
- Is the alley a two way or one way? Are you proposing to alter the flow?
 - *Applicant Response: It is currently two way and we anticipate it will remain a two way*
- The Parks Department Design Section met to discuss potential improvements to this park, possibly as part of this application. We appreciate any ideas the Applicant may have including tree trimming, grading, programming, and increasing interaction. The newly installed fence is not locked into the design and we are open to any other design improvements.
- Thank you for providing the freehand sketch. I would like to point out the party wall articulation and the alignment to the penthouse at the top. Refinements are possible to further reduce the 2D (flat) nature of the party wall.
- Project is moving in the right direction, the party wall sketch does show projection and wonder if there is more opportunity to extend the elements above the roof line to enhance interest.



- Nice looking building, fits the street context well. Suggest furthering the relationship to Cheltenham Park and the connection to Wisconsin Avenue.
- I like the transition of the base and how it breaks down the massing to the west and east. If there is a sufficient possibility that a building will develop next to you, the cantilever may 'weight' the entry and future development may make the entrance seem off. A massing study envisioning potential redevelopment of the adjacent site may be helpful to see how a future development could affect this design entrance.
 - *Applicant Response: We appreciate that comment, we were trying to create a sense of entry but if a new project does come next to us they could potentially build out above the entry, and it may or may not. We will do a massing study.*
- Fire exit and entrance results in three doors right next to each other in that entrance, it may get confusing. Could some of those doors be relocated to signify the importance of the main entrance? Locking down the design of this corner is important.
- Are we anticipating the property to the north would setback in future development scenario?
 - *Applicant Response: We are developing our project to allow light and air to our units, so our building will step back 15 feet, it would be nice if any future development also steps back but we are prepared for a neighboring building to be located on the property line.*
- It may require more than a 15-foot setback, if a building does get placed on the property line it will still be rather dark in those units.
 - *Applicant Response: We appreciate that comment, but we already have a very small floor plate and are restricted in stepping back more. We can study that a little more.*
- Guidelines call for a 10-foot setback at so many stories, you are proposing a small setback (3 feet) can you address how you are not adhering to that?
 - *Applicant Response: It comes down to the size of the building, we have tried to approach a massing gesture with more of a perceived setback rather than the full dimension. We are looking at alternative methods to increase that perception due to the small site constraints.*
- This is a 90-foot tall building, its more like a midrise not a tall tower, which helps that perception.
- I really like the idea of bumping out the northern unit to allow more light and air to avoid burying that unit in the future given the potential for the neighboring property to develop.
 - *Applicant Response: Some of our concern on that is that it creates an interior corner condition where one unit could look into another, but we can look into it moving forward and study that, it could definitely be an opportunity.*
- How did you make the decision of where you are folding the building down the street, ie how did you decide to come down 1/3 and then camp your building toward the park?
 - *Applicant Response: We were trying to use the entrance and scale of the lobby to proportionally draw your eye toward the park, we didn't want a long symmetrical fold, rather create a hierarchy within the façade with a long and short leg, the shorter leg going towards the higher density of Wisconsin Ave and the longer leg draws your eye towards the Park.*
- With the two options of the ground floor, are you leaning one way or the other?



- *Applicant Response: We are asking for flexibility on that, given the small constraints of the site we are unsure whether the building logistics would work better as condos or apartments.*
- Thank you for the streetscape improvements on the alley but it seems a little arbitrary with the alley treatment. Are you taking on some of the streetscape improvement in front of the park? It would be nice to continue the tree canopy along Cheltenham Park to enhance that language of the street.
 - *Applicant Response Right now the alley paving is a conceptual statement, it is not our intent to lead people into the alley as it serves several properties other than our own. We are currently gathering information on where the ROW exists in front of the Park and it's a work in progress.*
- It sounds like while the Parks Department wants the Park extended to the alley, it sounds like that may not be a good idea given the vehicular nature of the alley?
 - *Applicant Response: That is the conclusion that our study came to as well.*
- This is why the section showing the slope is so important as it will demonstrate why or why not the Park relationship is difficult to achieve. The design team needs to work with the Parks Department to properly achieve a solution there.
 - *Staff Response: At Sketch Plan this is the ideal time to bring up this concern, and it is something that we would typically flag now and have detailed solutions at the time of Site Plan.*

Public Comments

- Ms. Amanda Farber – Thank you for the streetscape improvements. We request a shadow study be conducted. Also want to mention the cantilever is only to the property line, and the Design Guidelines stepback recommendation is 15-20 feet and they are only proposing 3 feet which is a pretty big deviation.
- Hyojung (Parks Planner) – It sounds like the usage of the alley is a little ambivalent, it would be great if the alley could be considered one way and the special paving be expanded. Given that the north and west are party walls the south and east façade are really the entrance, these facades should be enhanced as such. The usage of Cheltenham Park should be augmented as a multi-generational Park to focus more on the design and less on the children running into the alley.
 - *Staff Response: Very good considerations for Site Plan. At Sketch Plan the Applicant should focus on the space and slope relationship.*

Panel Recommendations:

At Sketch Plan a straw vote is taken to determine whether the Project is on track to receive at least 10 points for design excellence. The Panel voted 5-0 that the Project is on track with the following comments to be addressed at Site Plan:

- a. Relationship of building to park – submit section analysis to determine the nature/treatment/functionality of alley



- b. Articulation of massing at entry with regard to future development of property to west
- c. Treatment of western façade to be more 3-dimensional and potential to extend northwest corner units to increase light and air.

