

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: Avondale, Site Plan submission

DATE: January 27, 2021

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*The **Avondale** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on January 27, 2021. 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 Site Plan stage and the Design Advisory Panel will determine if comments from Sketch Plan have been incorporated and take the final vote for design excellence public benefit points. Should you have any additional questions and/or comments please feel free to contact the Design Advisory Panel Liaison.*

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### Attendance:

#### Panel

George Dove

Rod Henderer

Damon Orobona

Qiaojue Yu

Brian Kelly

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

#### Staff

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Director

Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, DownCounty Planning

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor, DownCounty Planning

Grace Bogdan, Planner Coordinator, DownCounty Planning

Hyojung Garland, Supervisor, Park Planning

Emily Balmer, Administrative Assistant III, DownCounty Planning

#### Applicant Team

Soo Lee Cho, Miller, Miller & Canby

Kevin Park, SJ Investment Corp

Brett Swiatocha, Perkins Eastman DC Perkins

Pat LaVay, Macris Hendricks and Glascock, P.A.

*No members of the public were in attendance.*

***Staff: The Panel originally reviewed this at Sketch Plan, and at that time took straw vote that the Project was on track to meet the minimum design excellence points. Now at Site Plan, this review is more***



*focused on architectural detail, urban design, and public space for final determination of achieved design excellence public benefit points.*

## Discussion Points:

### Proposed Material Palette & elevations

- Can you explain the materials?
  - *Applicant Response: We've been exploring two main materials, a gray terra cotta panel with a linear plank expression along the façade with almost identical color with fiber cement panel at the corners. At the base, we are proposing a textured dark brick with a slight sheen for variation when light hits it, with large glass windows. The element along the sides will be at a different scale and texture but similar terra cotta or fiber cement panel. The window panel would be an accent metal yellow frame which would create depth and shadow. It is intended to be a simple material palette with grey and yellow.*
- I do not care for the treatment on the eastern elevation, will that be terra cotta as well? Those are expensive.
  - *Applicant Response: We are still determining the material, if not the terra cotta panels (more expensive material) then transition to fiber cement panel (less expensive material) along this elevation.*
- The articulation on the west side of the building, where exactly would the transition in material be?
  - *Applicant Response: On the western side, with this being a permanently exposed elevation, these elements would remain the same terra cotta material. The southern elevation, given the majority is blocked from public view, we anticipate transitioning to the less expensive material. For the eastern elevation (party wall) we would turn the corner with terra cotta panels, transition joint, then switch to the less expensive material (fiber cement panel).*
- I don't think you need the more complex elevation on the eastern side, but perhaps the panels at the corner could provide more articulation, meaning keep one bay of expressed panels. That would provide the transition from windows in front to less expensive materials and blank panels on the side and provide a 3D corner appearance.
  - *Applicant Response: That's a great comment, we can look into that.*
- The position of the canopy over the entrance seems like a peculiar position, is there a rationale? Reconsider the position to enhance the two-story lobby.
  - *Applicant Response: The intent was to break the datum of the base to allow expression of the towers, so to lower to the first floor was too much but this halfway seemed better. Some DAP members agreed with the Applicant.*
- You say it is a lot-line condition, but the rendering shows a space between the adjacent building, so it seems inconsistent.
  - *Applicant Response: When we modeled it, we did provide the space in anticipation that the neighbor may need it for loading but that is not known how the property will develop, or do we have authority over their building placement.*



## Avondale frontage

- The steps shown on the site plan, how many levels is that? Have you looked at trying to eliminate those with a different slope?
  - *Applicant Response: It is one level, and yes we have tried to eliminate the slope, but in doing so we would end up losing a floor of the building due to the slope constraints. The loss of development area is a real economic challenge. The occupied spaces are single elevation, but because of the relocation of the garage ramp from the east to the west side (sketch plan condition to consolidate curb cuts) the loading dock is at a higher elevation than the first floor, and the related trash and recycling area.*
- There is an enormous amount of pavement that is carving up the front lawn space. It would be great to minimize the hardscape and integrate various access points with the overall design. Is it absolutely essential for a two-way ramp for a garage with such a small amount of cars? It makes me nervous about the scale of the street, especially given that the intent was to create more of a front lawn and it is currently dominated by a significant amount of hardscape.
  - *Applicant Response: We've tried to narrow the size of the driveway unfortunately DOT has been reluctant to allow less than the minimum, but we can try again.*
- Perhaps a switchback ADA ramp would work to minimize the hardscape and move westward. The landscape to the west can have a more urban tone and the landscape to the east can transition to less urban.
  - *Applicant Response: The switchback was our original design but it works against the idea of more landscaping, we can explore moving it westward.*
- Is there a place for ADA drop off?
  - *Applicant Response: Currently no, and there is no parking along our frontage. The curb change is a result of the improvements to the entire street curb, but we can look into a drop off situation.*
- Do you have a landscape plan rendering for the Bethesda streetscape standards? The renderings I saw show street trees and shrubbery but it seems incomplete. Given this is the first project on the street it should set the tone for quality of materials and trees.
  - *Applicant Response: We do not have that level of detail yet. We did prepare schematic ones for sketch and preliminary submission, but we have not prepared those yet for this Site Plan submission.*
- I hope you can have as many street trees as possible, the renderings only show one. The deeper setback allows you to step down the two feet without being overpowering in the front lawn. The whole front needs to be intensely and well landscaped, not simply landscaped. I appreciate what you have done to the front elevation with the garage, tying the header to the garage and the front doors, creating a continual line.
- This project has come a very long way, and we appreciate the Team's efforts and setting an excellent tone to the street.



- I think the building has evolved very nicely since the Sketch Plan, and I think not all buildings can be accent buildings, there will always be background buildings, and this is a very nice background building.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The Panel generally agreed that the architecture has developed very nicely and that the applicant team should further develop the landscape design to address the street and building design, particularly with regard to accessibility from the sidewalk to the building entry.

