

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: 7070 Arlington Road

DATE: February 24, 2021

The 7070 Arlington Road project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on February 24, 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 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

George Dove

Rod Henderer (*arrived late*)

Brian Kelly

Damon Orobona

Qiaojue Yu

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

Staff

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Director of Planning

Elza Hisel-McCoy, DownCounty Division Chief

Stephanie Dickel, DownCounty Regulatory Supervisor

Grace Bogdan, Planner Coordinator

Hyojung Garland, Park Planning Supervisor

Rachel Newhouse, Parks Planner

Emily Balmer, DownCounty Administrative Assistant III



Applicant Team

Pat Harris, Attorney
Mark Hendrickson
Pat LaVay
Laurence Caudle
Fanny Gonzalez
Stefano Sani

Members of the Public

No public in attendance

Discussion Points:

Staff: The project is at Sketch Plan and the review is focused on massing, urban design with respect to design quality and conformance with Design Guidelines. This is the first time this project has been before the Panel, Staff has provided a memo outlining certain concerns related to height, proposed open space, and building massing perspectives

Panel:

General Proposal

- Happy to see the site redeveloped as it is an appropriate location for additional density. The height and massing look good given the context and the unique site layout, the precedents are interesting and on a good track.
- This project at its location is sorely needed as the current experience is not a great transition into the current urban environment. The way you propose corner massing being aligned with various components of Arlington Road. The Design Guidelines have surfaced well in this proposal and it will feel good from a pedestrian standpoint and a distance viewpoint.
- Thank you for providing a clear presentation about the thought process behind these schemes, it has been very helpful.
- Much of the success of this project is about the next steps and meeting the goals that you've shown us here today
- My hope is that the building will focus on the green building techniques and potentially net zero buildings, as that is what eh County Council is increasingly looking towards.
 - *Applicant Response: Thank you for bringing that up. With Federal Realty being a publicly traded company, we try to accomplish some level of sustainability in all our buildings. But what we've noticed now, our investors are actually demanding it and. We are certainly looking for opportunities to do that and often it works out but sometimes it brings other unforeseen issues but we do look to bring as much as we can into a project.*

Scheme Preference

- Would be nice to see these side by side, my preference is leaning towards the 'linked volumes scheme'. From the Capital Crescent side it presents a less agitated backdrop and makes sense as a northwest corner volume as a gateway piece to Bethesda Row well as a transition from the southern portion of Bethesda. The linked volumes schemes sets up the possibility for change of materials palettes and gives logic to that.

Materials & Articulation

- One of your diagrams of the north façade of the linear component you showed as a squiggly line and I thought that could mean as being more curvilinear and/or highly articulated façade atop of the lower retail.

Arlington Road Access Point/Open Space

- If we are moving the curb cut up on Arlington Road, the treatment of that space under the building will need to be treated more plaza and less alley like. Similar to the new Torti Gallis building facing Rock Creek Park. That gesture has more power to signal entry than the diagram currently shows. Perhaps the Lobby could be directly under the building opening up on a pocket plaza may help that space be more successful and better continuity with retail.
- The shared use streets concept is working very well, like down at the Wharf and that could be achieved here and those accessing the parking can help enliven the space.
- *Parks Staff:* The corner plaza is a key aspect as the other end of Bethesda Ave by Anthropologie store is an anchor space and the proposed pocket plaza could also function like in the future. West of Arlington Road is not really developed at this point but when it does redevelop, the plaza could really help anchor this corner as well. So please keep that in mind how this space could be a meet up space or otherwise activated as well.
 - *Applicant Response: Thank you for those comments, we have been internally discussing that potential as well.*

Height & Stepback

- Slide 24, I appreciate you trying to line up the height at the corner with the building across the street, however the 100' will be prominent given the other heights to the east will only be 70'. How effective will the 15' stepback be?
 - *Applicant Response: We can do some pedestrian studies to determine how effective the stepback will be and perhaps we can play with the 15' a little bit more, perhaps an additional 5 feet, as 15' is the minimum but the Guidelines recommend up to 20'.*
- The tower element should relate with size, height, and massing of the link going south along Arlington Road, and the stepback should be more related to the existing buildings across Bethesda Avenue to the north.
- The views in the 'linked volumes scheme' is more forgiving than the alternative scheme as the tower takes on a more articulated volume and a rationale for the verticality, perhaps if there was a slightly larger offset that may help.
- I would like to see more views from Bethesda Lane to determine how impactful that height is at the pedestrian level. I would also like to see views looking east on Bethesda Avenue from Griffin Cycle (bike shop).
- An alternative opinion, the 1 to 2 stepback is generally a reasonable stepback. I love the tower on the corner and de-emphasizing that may not be a positive thing.
- How does the Panel feel about the lower, mid, and tower? I think it is a little complicated with the varied heights.
- It is intriguing to me, I think what makes it is the 4-story Arlington Road component. And brings overall cohesiveness.

Panel Recommendations:

At Sketch Plan a straw vote is taken to determine whether the Project is on track to receive the minimum 10 points for Design Excellence. The Panel voted 5-0 that the Project is on track with the following to be addressed at the time of Site Plan:

- a. Provide additional pedestrian views from Bethesda Lane and Bethesda Avenue approximately 50 feet west of Arlington Road looking east to study if the current setback at the corner of Bethesda Avenue is sufficient.
- b. Enhance the space at the Arlington Road access point to be more plaza like.
- c. Provide a rendered landscape plan.