

OCTOBER 18, 2021

TO: Grace Bogdan

FROM: Steven K. Dickens, AIA LEED AP, Eric Colbert & Associates PC Architects

RE: Revisions to project design
4725 Cheltenham Drive, Bethesda, MD

Dear Ms. Bogdan:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to the few very pointed comments we received from the Downtown Bethesda Design Advisory Panel ("DAP") during the September 14, 2021 meeting. We appreciate the overwhelmingly positive response to the building design expressed by the DAP. The DAP had only a few substantive comments about the base/podium portion of the building along Cheltenham Drive, which we were asked to address. Specifically, we heard the following comments:

- In general, the eastern (2-story) and western (3-story) portions of the base/podium did not seem sufficiently cohesive to the DAP, who specifically pointed to the very consistent treatment in the sketch from the Sketch Plan.
- In specific, the eastern (2-story) portion seemed "earthbound" and "heavy," in unfavorable contrast to the lightness of the western (3-story) portion.
- The DAP's recommendation was to make the two portions more parallel in architectural articulation, and specifically to revise the eastern portion to be more like the western portion.

I would note that, although in the meeting I defended the level of cohesiveness and detail character of the design of the eastern portion of the base, afterwards, I came around to the DAP's view. The eastern portion of the base did not have the light touch of the rest of the façades, and in that, it was not cohesive with the western portion of the base. We appreciate the DAP's astute observation.

In response to the comments received, we have revised the design of the base/podium. The primary change is that the cleaner lines and lightness of the western portion are now extended to the eastern portion. But, as we studied the situation, it ended up working the other way, too. The planters of the eastern portion have extended to the western portion, creating an asymmetrical line of movement across the entire facade, and reducing the sense of exposure of the second-floor balconies to the sidewalk and entrance below. Also, the solid masonry end walls of the eastern/2-story portion now appear at the west side of the western/3-story portion.

We believe that these changes, resulting from the DAP's request for further evaluation, are solid improvements to the building design. The façade is now architecturally cohesive; the somewhat busy and heavy detailing of the eastern side has been replaced by the cleaner, lighter detailing of the western side; and a couple of other elements have been extended to provide movement to the façade.

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With this refinement, we submit to you that the project very much fulfills the “exceptional design” criteria. It provides innovative solutions in response to the immediate context – in this case, not only several different immediately surrounding contexts, given the Property’s location as a transitional site, but also the present versus likely future context, as a result of the future redevelopment potential of the CVS site. The project creates a sense of place and serves as a landmark, which is critical since, even when adjacent sites are redeveloped, it will remain an anchor at the transition point between dense, mixed-use Wisconsin Avenue and the Park and adjacent single-family residential neighborhood. The project enhances the public realm in a distinct and original manner, with sensitive and unique architectural moves on both Cheltenham Drive and the alley (present public realms) and the west side (present public realm which will be blocked in the future, if and when the CVS site redevelops). The mix of woodgrain, charcoal brick, and metal panels draws from the context but is arranged in unique forms designed to have movement and depth to engage the eye.

This is a compact infill development replacing a one-story, automobile-oriented building on a constrained (10,654 sf) site. The innovative “Junior 1-bedroom” model used for the majority of the units optimizes the land use, and provides full-service apartments that fill a niche between studios and full 1-bedrooms. In buildings we’ve done in D.C., which have this model (both open for seven years), it has been found that the tenant group uses public transit and walks at a much higher level than almost any other group. These will be tenants who overwhelmingly walk for quotidian shopping and entertainment; accordingly, they can be expected to enhance Bethesda’s urban character, use the adjacent Park, and generally create activity in the area.

In terms of environmental impact mitigation, the project has two particularly strong points: stormwater management will be dramatically improved (the existing condition has none, and has no pervious surfaces or green roofs), and the project’s energy performance is designed to be about 21% over baseline. A less prominent, but important feature is “bird-safe design.” At the base, which is the area of greatest concern due to adjacent street trees, the depth and layering of the facades will reduce the reflections which are the primary source of the problem.

As I understand it, the “exceptional design” criteria is assessed in proportion to the scale of the project and its context. By standards of Downtown Bethesda, this is not a large building and as such cannot make the dramatic design moves that some of the larger buildings can – in fact, we submit that these dramatic design moves would not be appropriate on this site. Importantly, the building’s massing and façade treatments are tailored to the specific (and very different) contexts of each of the four exposures, and the Property’s unique location as a transitional site. The design shows high-quality materials and compositional effort on all facades. It packs a lot of punch in a modest-sized project. As such, we continue to seek 23 exceptional design public benefit points.

We appreciate DAP’s thoughtful and constructive comments in their previous review. We believe these comments have resulted in an improved building design worthy of the exceptional design points being requested. We look forward to discussing these updates with the DAP on October 27.

Sincerely,



Steve Dickens

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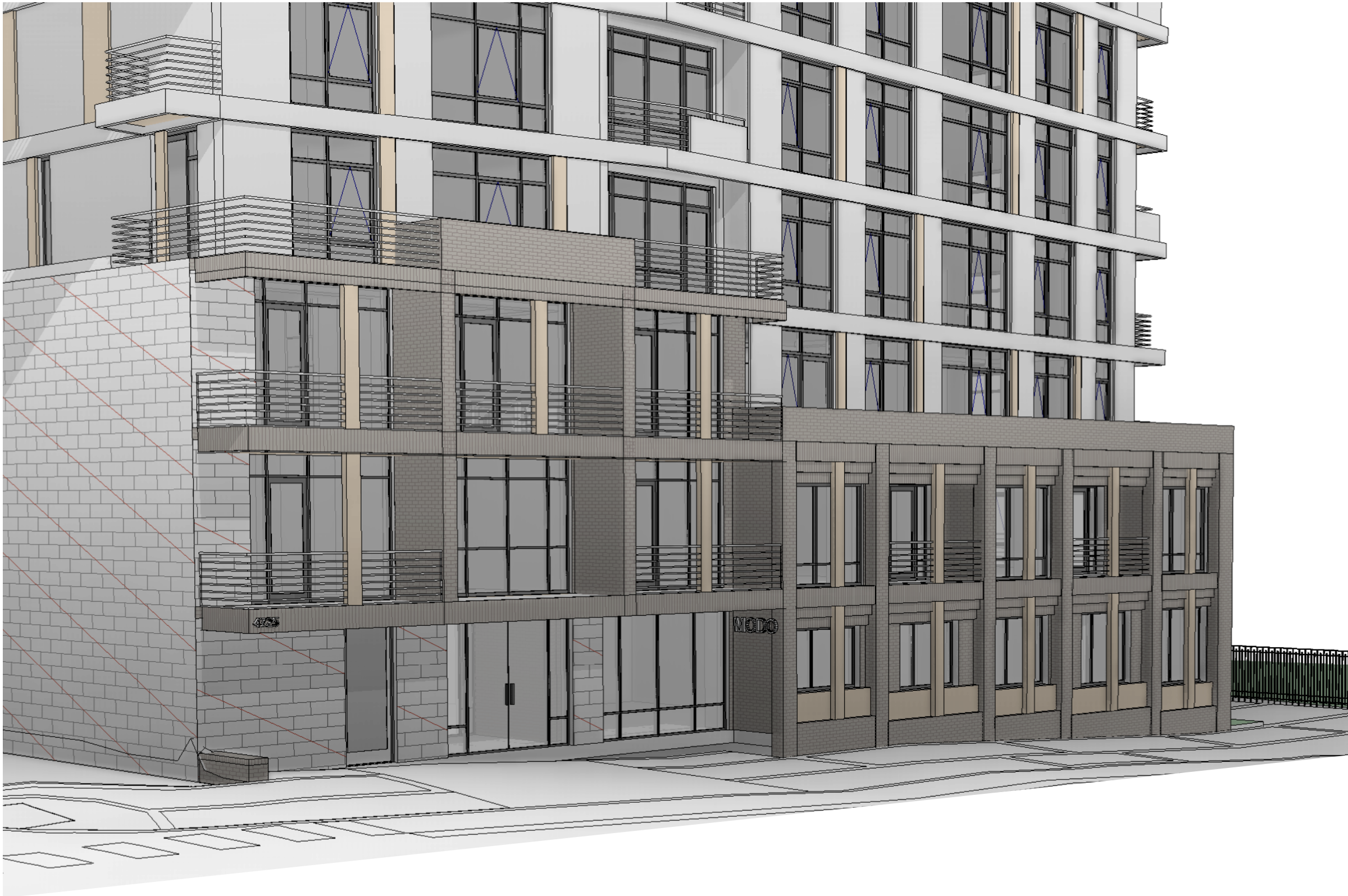
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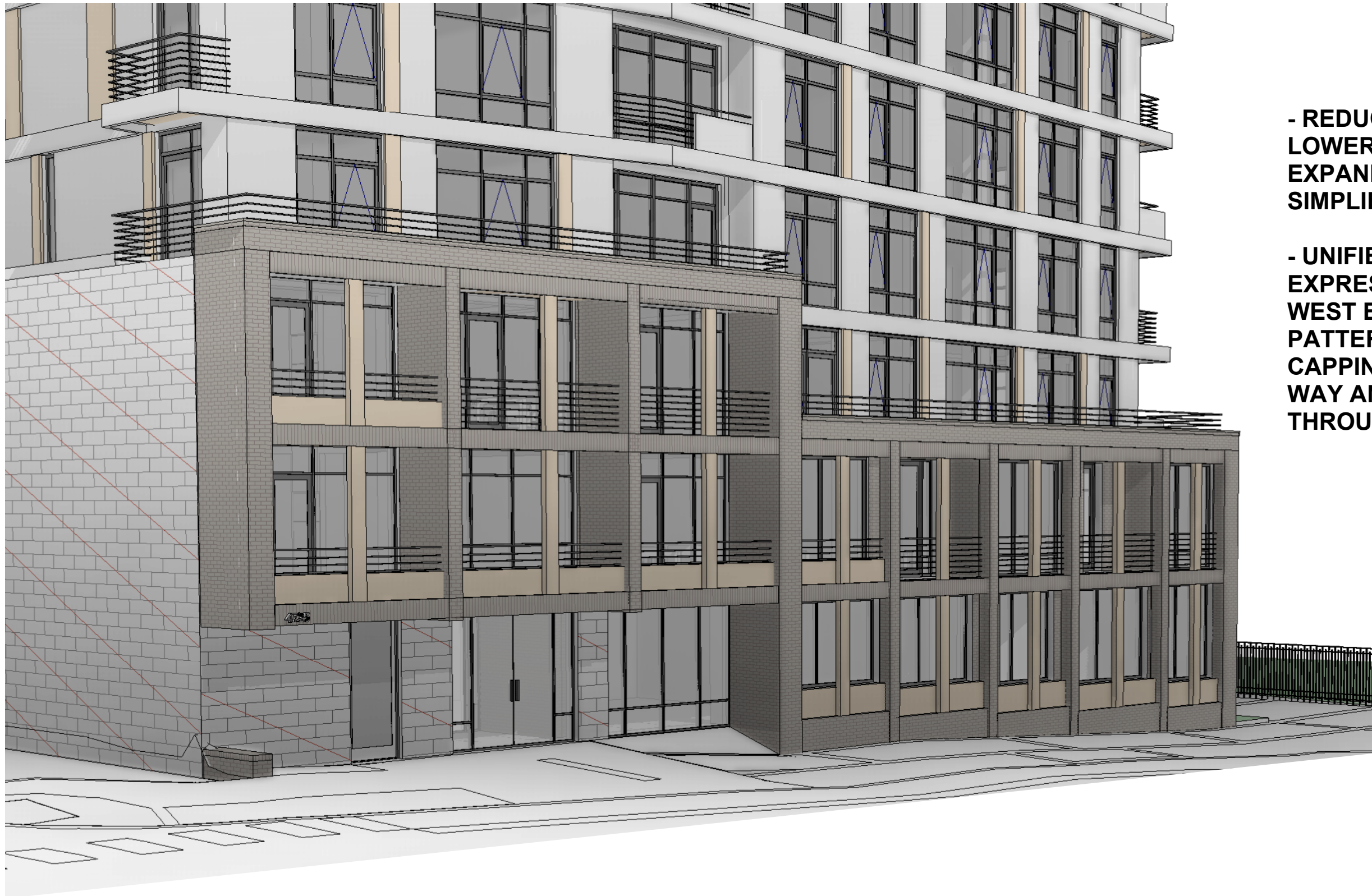
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DAP - BUILDING'S BASE REDESIGN
10.18.2021

FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY





- REDUCED THE HEAVINESS BY LOWERING THE PARAPET, EXPANDING THE WINDOWS AND SIMPLIFYING THE BRICKWORK

- UNIFIED THE DESIGN EXPRESSION BETWEEN EAST & WEST BY REPEATING THE PATTERNS CONSISTENTLY, CAPPING BOTH ENDS IN THE SAME WAY AND HAVING PLANTERS THROUGHOUT



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