

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: 4901 Battery Lane

DATE: February 23, 2022

*The **4901 Battery Lane** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on February 23, 2022. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel's discussion, recommendations regarding design excellence, and the exceptional design public benefits points. 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 if it is determined the Project is suitable. 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

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, Chief of DownCounty Planning

Stephanie Dickel, DownCounty Regulatory Supervisor

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Adam Bossi, Planner III

Hyojung Garland, Park Planning Supervisor

Emily Balmer, DownCounty Administrative Assistant III

Applicant Team

Nancy Regelin – Shulman Rogers

Brian Strott – WC Smith Development

Brad Fennel – WC Smith Development

Matt Ritz – WC Smith Development



Chris Huffer – SK+I Architects
Chanda Beaufort – VIKI civil
Trini Rodriguez – Parker Rodriguez Landscape Architect
Steven Sattler – Parker Rodriguez Landscape Architect

Members of the Public

Michael Fetchko

Discussion Points:

Staff: The project is at Site Plan therefore the review is focusing on detailed architectural review, and the DAP may vote on design excellence points at the meeting's end. Staff provided a memo outlining a summary of changes in response to the DAP's comments from the September meeting when the related Sketch Plan was reviewed.

Panel:

General Comments

- I'm very pleased with the direction of this project and how our comments have been integrated into the site plan and landscape. The side view articulation is very simple but nice.
- I think this has become a really elegant building. The only comment I have is the lack of quality materials or design detail around the dog park, which is a relatively small comment. Thank you for the very thorough presentation.
- In terms of grading, is there any planting or detail design proposed to break up the retaining wall in the rear to avoid it looking blank?
 - *Applicant Response: This was intended to be integrated within the courtyard. We are right on the property line here so there may not be room for plantings but we can use a different material to provide some articulation relief.*
 - *There are actually trees here on the adjacent property that will help screen, but we removed them from this perspective for clarity.*

Pedestrian Connections

- The thru block connection has been shifted to the east a bit, I think that shift, along with the pavement material, help distinguish it as public open space.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, there will be a front building entrance onto Battery Lane, the drop off will be a secondary entrance for deliveries and taxis.*
- I appreciate the refinements that have been made to the site plan, particularly the nodes that were created in the rear and I wonder how they will be maintained being so close to the public sidewalk areas?
 - *Applicant response: We did include a buffer area here and so we think it will be able to be maintained. We also think having the dog area in the rear will help activate, and we find that those that own dogs tend to live here because they like the dog run and social activity that it brings.*

Architecture

- When we first reviewed this at Sketch Plan we saw the precedent pictures and the architecture presented today has grown into that.
- The base has been designed through formation and wraps to the west side. The west, north, and east elevation spandrel should create a grounding but disappears. The northern portion of the western and eastern elevation loses the sense of gracefulness particularly at the base. I know you do not have the option of relief but maybe a spandrel of articulation could be added to distinguish the base from the shaft. All elevations should ground gracefully so I think this can be achieved here as well. I'm not advocating a setback, just an articulation on the surface within a shallow dimension would be something to think about.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, we can look at an additional change of a spandrel or a belt course.*

Public Comments:

- Why is so much more space provided in the rear of the building rather than at the street frontage? The pedestrian realm on the frontage is much smaller than at the rear but will be utilized more. Will the utilities be undergrounded?
 - *Staff: Yes, the utilities will be undergrounded. The project frontage is in conformance with the streetscape standards for Battery Lane in the Design Guidelines, and the rear is also required as the Sector Planned through block connection.*
 - *Applicant response: If you look at the setbacks of the existing buildings on Battery Lane, what is proposed will provide a slow transition from Woodmont down to Old Georgetown*
 - *Panel response: Perhaps the building's entry and canopy could be recessed a bit to reduce encroachment into the public ROW? This creates a slightly recessed "alcove" prior to entering the lobby which gives a more expansive and comfortable entry experience from the sidewalk. That is something the architect and team might want to study and incorporate.*

Panel Recommendations:

The Applicant is requesting 15 design excellence points. The Panel voted unanimously that the Project receive 15 points for design excellence with the following comment:

- Consider recessing the building entry at the Battery Lane frontage to soften the impact of the wide building frontage and building canopy on the pedestrian experience along Battery Lane.