

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** 7126 Wisconsin Avenue

**DATE:** October 26, 2022

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*The **7126 Wisconsin Avenue** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on October 26, 2022. 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.*

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### **Attendance:**

#### Panel

George Dove

Brian Kelly

Rod Henderer

Damon Orobona

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

#### Staff

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Planning Director

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning

Atul Sharma, Acting Assistant to the Deputy Development & Design Review

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Adam Bossi, Planner III

Henry Coppola, Park Planner

Rachel Newhouse, Park Planner

Hyojung Garland, Park Planning Supervisor

#### Applicant Team

Heather Dlhopsky – Attorney, Wire Gill

Josh Etter – Developer, Foulger Pratt

Andy Czajkowski – Architect, SK&I

Joanna Hess – SK&I

Valeria Hochman – SK&I

Matthew Pohlhaus – Bohler Engineering



## Discussion Points:

Staff: The project was recently reviewed by the DAP in April of 2022, introducing Site Plan level details. The DAP had minor refinement comments and had requested that the applicant return to show the panel greater detail of the exterior treatment of the building. They also had requested the applicant apply for more than the minimum 10 points. Today's submission addresses those requests.

Panel:

### *General Comments*

- I think the project has come an enormously far way. I think there is coherence to the language that is woven between the different materials at the base, middle, and top particularly with the addition of the brick zipper, I think it is a clever way that weaves the whole language together.
- I agree with the comments on the building's evolution, I think this design has come along quite nicely and I applaud the team.
- The two-story top features the lower floor as an amenity space and then to top most floor is mechanical above? It looks nice in the rendering, but it will likely be two separate kinds of glass up there. It is not going to be as simple as that with lighting at the top, right? The rendering shows both floors with identical glass treatments and the lighting through the windows is the same creating a two-story reading. The lighting might be a nice terminus to the tower. I am just curious thinking that it won't read quite like that in real life, not sure what to do about it and I understand the dilemma but just wanted to point that out. How do you make it read as a two-story element? Or, what do you do that acknowledges this difference yet provide a striking and important top to the building?
  - *Applicant Response: Yes it would be two different types of glass, there is no other location for our mechanical, that would be the only solution.*
- I think the detail and design is wonderful and came a long way. However, this building is so similar to another proposed building just a little farther north on Wisconsin Avenue, so these final details are going to be very important. There are so many similarities, I am a little concerned about this portion of the Wisconsin corridor.
  - *Applicant Response: We've been thinking about that a lot too, inherently there are a lot of similarities between the sites, they are about the same width, depth, height, and the same setbacks apply. Once we make the same fundamental decisions and programming needs, it does result in a similar massing. Having said all those things, once we get past the proportions, they are markedly different. This is a masonry building, aside from the corner and the setbacks and varying building heights are slightly different with datum planes. I think the biggest difference is that the other will be a window wall and this will be mostly masonry.*

Base

- At the base, I think what you've done is nice but I'm just curious what your floor-to-floor height is?
  - *Applicant Response: The ground floor is about 16 feet here and then it gets taller as it tapers along down Bethesda Avenue.*
  - It does look lower than what we would expect at the corner, typically we would want about 17 or 18 feet, but the street is sloped.
- The verticals at the base corner, are they going to be pushed into the unit or pushed out?
  - *Applicant Response: That will be pushed into the unit, we've been thinking about how to subtly light the corner, so the unit residents are not overwhelmed with light. It goes back to Rod's earlier comment about the top, the lighting will be very important, and we haven't gotten into those details yet. It is only one unit but yes, we are thinking about that. Again, I think the redesign will really open up that intersection corner.*

#### Balconies

- Can you go into detail on what you are proposing with the balconies and the railings? The detail of it, with the top and bottom rail that you're showing it looks more like a panel rather than simply vertical elements. In a more modern version you would not see the top and bottom rail, it's a minor detail but I wonder if it is just not quite there yet? Maybe the bottom could go away, and they can connect in a different way to the balcony slab. There is another solution but that is a very expensive solution.
  - *Applicant Response: This is probably the best example here, we think the more elegant way is to do pickets but have them extend down past the slab as opposed to top mounted. It covers the slab in an elegant way, but also simplifies the design in a modern way.*
  - I think the bottom is a necessary function to tie everything together
- Is the slab edge exposed behind this? instead of a slab edge could you have an overlay to make the edge go away?
  - *Applicant Response: Yes, it is exposed and we can paint the edge to disguise the connection but the panel itself is manufactured as a frame with the top and bottom.*
  - If it were to be any other way would be much more costly.

#### **Panel Recommendations:**

The Applicant is requesting 20 points for design excellence, the Panel voted 4-0 with no further comments.

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** 4702 Chevy Chase Drive

**DATE:** October 26, 2022

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Rachel Newhouse, Park Planner

Hyojung Garland, Park Planning Supervisor

#### Applicant Team

Pat Harris – Attorney, Lerch Early

Hans Schmidt – Management, Winthrop

Max Gross - Winthrop

Luz Del Mar Rosado – Architect, Lessard Design

Roxanne Edwards – Lessard Design

Gaëlle Gourmelon – Landscape Architect, MKSK Studios



Tim Longfellow – Engineer, GLW Engineering  
Mark Johnston – GLW Engineering

### Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the first site plan presentation to the DAP. The project was originally reviewed by the DAP as a sketch plan in September of 2020. At Site Plan stage, the review is focused on more detailed and developed architectural expression and site design, consistent with the Design Guidelines.

Panel:

### *General Comments*

- So you went from 70 to 49 units, did you make the building smaller or the building units bigger? I think the changes that you made will make the residents on Nottingham happy with the current trash truck situation. I also understand you moved the trash from Nottingham to Chevy Chase Drive correct?
  - *Applicant Response: We did slightly reduce from 85,000 to 79,000 sf but the units also became larger and the amenity areas became larger. And yes, the trash removal is located off Chevy Chase Drive and does not require an additional driveway access point.*

### *Elevations*

- I have some reservations about the elevations. It looks like you are going for a classical and not modern style. That said, I think it is a bit busy. A classical style relies on elegance and I'm not sure I'm seeing it here yet.
  - *Applicant Response: We thought the metal system along the windows was the right move, but I understand the aspect of business, we've done several things along the way and we've reduced some muttoning. I think the 2D drawings are not doing justice for the setbacks which may help with the simplicity.*
  - *We were really inspired by classical, neoclassical architecture like Robert A.M. Stern's work. He's done some recent work in DC that was more monotone and we've tried to do similar.*
- Yes, I'm familiar with Stern's work and I'm not disputing the concept of a classical building, but the fundamental difference is there is discipline to how Stern applies material and logic.
- In looking at the Chevy Chase Drive elevation, in the mind of Bob Stern, the central block and the bay to the left creates a bay width but the bay directly to the right tries to pick up a proportion. This is all positioned over the top of the garage that has a pilaster coming down on the lenthil, and I think Stern would cringe at that. I think there are some issues of center, recenter, and materiality and controlling language.
- Perhaps if the building had a more classical base and everything above it could be lighter and was a different material that might call to question the brick pilasters on the upper floor. That might be better handled if it were not trying to be part of the classical language.

- In teaching students about renaissance architecture, one of the big innovations of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is figuring out that you put solids over solids and voids over voids, and when you put a solid over a void you do so at peril. You need to invent an artifice to handle that, and the garage door doesn't do that at the moment.
- Centering is also a big issue. Perhaps if you expand the pallet and approach the language with more rigor, restraint, and discipline. But there is an old adage, you can change the plane, color, and material but if you do all those in one fell swoop it becomes a debacle.
  - *Applicant response: thank you, are these comments about one façade specifically or all four sides?*
  - All four sides.
- I do think this is a lot of building on a smaller site and congratulate you on figuring out the surface aspects of it with four sides.
- On the west façade with the metal panels, do the colors need to be toned down?
  - *Applicant response: We did want to be more subtle and originally had darker colors*
- Are there any 3D renderings that would help support this?
  - *Applicant response: No, we do not have 3D at this point*
  - I think what is preventing a good full review of this design is the lack of 3D presentation, it does not do you any favors.
- If you look at the left portion there is a strong cornice, but on the right side there is a similar attempt but it is much thinner, in classical architecture, an entablature would work like a belt and wrap around the entire building and would cause a distinction on the salient on the right hand side that might have a heavier band.
- East elevation seems the strongest so maybe this can be extended to the others
- I think it's about creating a coherent language that works for the building and helps turn the corner and would create a sensation of a base and middle as the building rises up.
  - *Applicant response: I think that's a point very well taken, and we want to achieve that. We will create more consistency, taking in all the comments and tailor it into each elevation.*

### **Panel Recommendations:**

The panel requested the Applicant team return with a 3d presentation and design that has refined the materiality and created a more cohesive language on all four sides based on the comments received.