

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** 7820 Wisconsin Avenue

**DATE:** November 30, 2022

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*The **7820 Wisconsin Avenue** project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on November 30, 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 Concept Plan stage and the Design Advisory Panel will subsequently review the project at Sketch and Site Plan, where the final vote for design excellence public benefit points is determined. 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

Qiaojue Yu

Damon Orobona

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

#### Staff

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

Phil Hummel – Attorney,

Brandon Wright – Developer, Crescent Communities

Fiver Soraruf – Architect, Design Collective

Scott Geczi – Architect, Design Collective

Ian Duke – Engineer, VIKA



## Members of the Public

Amanda Farber

### Discussion Points:

Staff: This project is at Concept Plan stage, but anticipates coming in under the “Speed-to-Market” Initiative, which allows the Sketch Plan and Site Plan reviews to occur concurrently.

Panel:

### *General Comments*

- What are the Speed-to-Market criteria? I didn’t quite understand that.
  - *Staff: This project is proposing 25% MPDUs, so any project that proposes a Countywide priority such as affordable housing can come under the Speed-to-Market Initiative which allows a concurrent review for Sketch, Preliminary, and Site Plans within the 120-day review process.*
  - So, the next round will be a Sketch and Site Plan reviews with site plan level details?
  - *Yes, it will be both with site plan level details for DAP consideration of points, with however many meetings in front of the Panel necessary to come to that determination.*

### *Open Space*

- What happened to the southern parcel being part of Veteran’s Park expansion?
  - *Parks Staff: After a couple years of working with this group and others we reached the understanding that doing the full build out of the civic green on this site was not going to achieve all the recommendations. We are looking for another location to the west for the full civic green. Parks is still very excited about the open space here and there is significant Sector Plan language enforcing what we are looking for here.*
  - Is it because of the two other existing buildings?
  - *There is a lot that went into it, more than what I think is worthy of today’s discussion, but we are happy to outline a memo of the history to the Panel.*
  - I think it is pertinent to our evaluation of the project. Now that the Park is not part of this, it is an important hinge.
- The Sector Plan calls for a ½-acre space and for that to be realized here it would require 80-90 feet from curb of Norfolk Avenue to building face on the entire southern end of the block. Currently, the proposal shows about 40 feet, which is clearly not enough space.
- What is the future of the two corner properties? I assume you approached those owners? It would only make sense when they redevelop that those properties would connect this space to Veteran’s Park.
  - *Applicant Response: We did, and they were not interested in selling. As a private developer we have no control over their properties but tried to focus on the design*

*of this project not prohibiting a future connection from our site through the corner properties to Veteran's Park. We've also designed the retail spaces to be open on the party walls to allow further connection to the corner properties in the future. We've considered a temporary structure like a green wall.*

- When those two parcels ever do develop, it does allow for a nice wide connection from Cheltenham Park to the east. One of the projects we reviewed next to Cheltenham Urban Park does provide the double row of canopy trees which could extend through this site.
  - *Applicant Response: When we originally met with staff, the building extended out into that space but we've tempered that back now. It is being shown as a green wall but we want something temporary there that can be reimaged when those parcels redevelop. The building is being set back 35' now.*
- Where are you measuring from for that?
  - *Applicant Response: From the Norfolk curb.*
  - *Staff: It is about 43' from the curb, and Norfolk Avenue pavement is about 48' in width.*
- I would point out that the corner building is the problem no matter which way you go. If you can't get the corner parcel to ever redevelop, the 48' linear component would satisfy what we are trying to do. Ruining a terrific project on a 'maybe' acquisition, I think the people who chose to go this way made a good decision.
- Given the nature of the two existing buildings to the west, this is making a valiant effort. You mentioned early on that the landscaping is conceptual, maybe the piece labelled 'retail plaza' may be rethought and the landscaping character might have an inevitability to it for the connection to the west. Not sure what that means but perhaps a chess game played over time, but this opening move should make clear that whatever happens in the next move in the redevelopment of the site to the west furthers that game. Right now, it is a little generic, and 'retail plaza' doesn't quite capture the gravitas of Veterans Park. With a different name at your parcel, it could capture the theme of Veterans Park.
- *Staff: Right now, the Sector Plan connection is civic green, and one of the tenants of that is a multi-use lawn space, perhaps you could start to think about how that plays with the retail plaza and your intent of a biophilic design. Along with this is the Canopy Corridor designation recommendations for Norfolk Avenue with a double row of trees. Could the panel provide some direction on how the space should be activated? Should it be a connected space or a space of congregation?*
  - Well given what the Sector Plan has recommended, the value of having it here is connecting Wisconsin Avenue to Woodmont Triangle.
- Can we rethink how that sidewalk reads along Norfolk Avenue? It currently feels like an edge, but could it become more flexible and play a game of "centerness" that helps with the double row of trees that creates an alley or node along this line? Could it drive a visual line from Wisconsin Avenue to the Park? Perhaps the wide planting boxes and narrow sidewalk are changed to favor a clearer, singular passage between Wisconsin and Woodmont with the alley of trees in it.

- I agree with that sentiment. I also think the long protruding canopy over the space makes this space feel more private. The current design of the sidewalk and canopy are creating a feeling of private rather than public.
  - *Applicant Response: I think that's a really interesting idea, I know Norfolk Avenue is currently classified as a shared street and would be visualized as a public connection and I am wondering how the landscape behind curb reflects that.*
  - Staff: While the Sector Plan does identify this area of Norfolk Avenue as a shared street, while under review it has been determined that this portion of Norfolk Avenue will not be as successful as a shared street as farther west.
- I'm wondering about this corner at Wisconsin Avenue and Norfolk Avenue and Parks are used and not used but I think it would be much better activated by a building that contributes to the area rather than an open space that is not activated. I think the way you have developed it is actually very good and solid. It is not unusual in a healthy urban environment to have pedestrian spaces squeezed and then bigger, if the effort to consolidate this has already delayed the project 5 years, I think this a great way to move forward. I am impressed by the entire presentation, including the architectural style and solar orientation, and biophilic design, so kudos. Materiality and design are working very well and I'm impressed that each façade is different.
- I like the idea of this cantilever at the southern façade, but I am wondering if the extent that it projects in the southerly direction is too much. Right now, it is more of an episode, but what if it was more of a connection, like a loggia without columns that extends down to the party wall to the west that is an edge to the urban/civic plaza space that supports a transition and unifies the space? I'm all about driving this access so the next player in the game needs to respect this space to connect through. The reality of those two buildings redeveloping is questionable, because the footprint seems miniscule. Instead of extreme projection from the building mass, perhaps it pulls back and continues in the westerly direction to unify the space and give it a continuity to it.
- If that building has to be there, maybe the county could grant them extra height to put it on pilotis as one possibility to give it a visual connection.
- The civic green space at the Mosaic District in Merrifield, VA is very comparable to this space with retail and a water feature and scale. It is highly used and activated, there are many similarities that you could use as precedent here. The green feature in that space is not much larger than what you are trying to do here and has a projection screen.

#### *Building Stepbacks and tower setbacks*

- The setbacks along the streets need to be addressed, if you are not doing them, it has to be more than because 'your site is too small.' What are you doing to mitigate that issue? In the past, the Board has been really cognizant of these setbacks and has made them a significant issue. The proposed setback and cantilever on the north façade basically suggests setting back and popping back out. The setback along Wisconsin Avenue, the tower seems setback slightly above the podium, but along the north it, does not visually feel like the tower is setback at all from the podium and this needs to be addressed and justified.

- *Applicant Response: We did try to address that at the corners to highlight the verticality of the tower coming to the ground and adding texture with balconies at the corners.*

### Architecture

- I think the architecture is really great if you accept that Veteran's Park is not part of the scene, but I know how important that is to the vision of this area of Bethesda.
- Tower separation is another issue. To the east is successful but to the north, what happens if the corner does redevelop with only a 10' setback?
  - *Applicant Response: Well practically speaking, it does constrain what happens here.*
  - I think that was the issue five years ago when we first saw this. It sounds like the whole block should redevelop together but it just doesn't seem feasible.
- I love the massing and the solar orientation but the style and skin look very commercial and seem very identical to Marriot across the street. Can you address why this office aesthetic was chosen?
  - *Applicant response: We are going to be incorporating balconies and perhaps some additional Juliet balconies for additional texture. The bigger difference this will have to the Marriot is this will have 24/7 activity will come alive at night. It will become the heart of this area with residents turning on lights, and the glass skin is timeless will allow that. It is aesthetic, you're right, we thought we could give scale and rhythm and changes in floor plats that make it do things that are not just a glass box.*
  - *One thing I'll add is that it will have operable windows and the balconies help give it a residential feel and louvers will help further break down the skin.*
  - *Staff: With the south facing façade I think there is an opportunity here to explicitly integrate the biophilic concepts at the ground level further up the building. So this corner could be evaluated with an eye that makes sure the space flows upward as opposed to a deep wall.*
- I wonder to what extent the operable windows will play down on this space. It will be interesting to see a rendering with those windows opened and closed to see the reality of the skin and how it gives punctuation to the building.
- Are there balconies on the lower floor?
  - *Applicant Response: There is the retail at the base with two story amenities with a deep terrace and there are no balconies on the south given shade from the Marriot, but the west and east side and north will have balconies.*
  - I don't think the tower needs to be further accentuated but the lower 60-80 feet are most important from the pedestrian level.
- I like what you've done with the top and the solar panels, but this will be the tallest tower in Bethesda, it needs to have a unique top. It will be the defining element in the skyline.

### Public Comment

Will send written comments regarding Sector Plan recommendations surrounding Veterans Park.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The Applicant will return at Sketch and Site Plan with comments addressed herein including:

- Importance of open space design, how it will read as public and connected through the future corner block connection with implementation of the canopy corridor
- How the building will comply with, or mitigate where it does not comply with, the design guidelines.

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** 4824 Edgemoor Lane

**DATE:** November 30, 2022

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*This is an informational item for a Site Plan amendment to a project the Panel previously reviewed and voted on.*

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### **Attendance:**

#### Panel

George Dove

Brian Kelly

Rod Henderer

Qiaojue Yu

Damon Orobona

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

#### Staff

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning

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

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Rachel Newhouse, Park Planner

Hyojung Garland, Park Planning Supervisor

#### Applicant Team

Pat Harris – Attorney, Lerch, Early & Brewer, Chtd

Shawn Weingast – Developer, Acumen Properties

Bill Bonstra – Architect, Bonstra Architects

Wade McKinney – Architect, Bonstra Architects

#### Discussion Points:

Staff: This is an informational item to determine if the DAP would like to re-review the project based on the proposed amendments. The Applicant proposes to increase the number of units but remain within the approved maximum density, building footprint, and building form. Due to the increase in units there are minor changes proposed to the facades including window modulations and additional balconies.



Panel:

- I looked at the redlines included in the submission packet, I do not see this as a substantive change and do not believe this needs to be discussed again.
- Agreed.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The Project will maintain the previously approved Exceptional Design points with the Site Plan amendment.



**From:** [Amanda Farber](#)  
**To:** [Brown, Angela](#); [Bogdan, Grace](#); [Dickel, Stephanie](#)  
**Subject:** Comments for DAP/DRC re: 7820 Wisconsin Ave  
**Date:** Tuesday, December 6, 2022 8:45:41 AM  
**Attachments:** [Screen Shot 2022-12-05 at 5.55.12 PM.png](#)

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**[EXTERNAL EMAIL]** Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Good morning -

I was not able to remain on the zoom to provide comments during last Wednesday's DAP meeting due to a prior commitment, so I wanted to follow up with three main comments/concerns in writing at this time for the DAP/DRC.

1) Transparency of planning decisions. During the meeting a representative for the developer stated:

*"And during this time, this five-year period, the applicant filed the sketch plan in 2017 and a preliminary plan in 2021 and MNCPPC acquired from a private owner the 7800 and 7810 Wisconsin properties in 2020 and 2021. And finally after considerable discussions the Planning Department and the Parks Department leadership determined that the Veterans Park Civic Green which is described in the Design Guidelines in the Sector Plan would not be located on this block - or a privately owned substitute also would not be located on this block - and let the applicant know of this decision which then therefore put this issue to rest and allow the development to proceed. MNCPPC is now in the process of selling 7800 and 7810 Wisconsin Avenue to the applicant which allows them to be included in the development application. MNCPPC has consented to that so now the entire project comprises what you see all outlined in green - 7800 7810 7820 Wisconsin Avenue and 7815 Woodmont Avenue to the west."*

This is troubling. This significant land use / Bethesda Downtown Plan implementation decision regarding the Veterans Park Civic Green and the sale of this land was made by Park and Planning leadership / MNCPPC with no notice to - or input from - the Bethesda Implementation Advisory Committee or public.

This raises several questions - who made these decisions, when were they made, what are the terms of this "consented to" sale of land to the developer, will the money from the sale (including any profit) be returned to the Park Impact Payment fund, have the properties for an alternative site for the Civic Green been secured?

2) Actual size of the retail plaza. Several statements made during the DAP indicated that the retail plaza for 7820 Wisconsin would be a "comparable size" to the civic green in the Mosaic development in Merrifield Virginia. However, looking at the plans and the two sites, the proposed 7820 Wisconsin retail plaza appears to be approximately .1-acres along Norfolk Ave (not including the sidewalk). Meanwhile, just the *main section* of the

civic green at Mosaic is approximately .4-acres (not including the sidewalk or the jewel box coffee shop or the east side of the civic green); in total it is even larger. The Mosaic civic green is also not flanked by two 300+ ft buildings. The proposed 7820 retail plaza is considerably smaller than the Mosaic civic green, and definitely smaller than the .5-acre civic green recommended in the master plan.

3) Impacts of tall all-glass buildings. East Bethesda residents have learned from living directly next to the Marriott HQ project that there can be disadvantages to certain all glass buildings. These include the palpable heat which reflects and radiates off the building - especially during the summer. As well as glare. Another large all-glass building next door - without more thoughtful use of glass - has the potential to add to the heat impacts.

FAIRMONT AVE



RETAIL

GARAGE RAMP

LOADING

TRASH

AMENITY

LOBBY

EXISTING  
OWNED BY OTHERS

RETAIL

EXISTING  
OWNED BY OTHERS

RETAIL  
PLAZA

NORFOLK AVE



Ruler

Line

Path

Polygon

Circle

3D path

3D polygon

Measure the distance or area of a geometric shape on the ground

Perimeter:

324.85

Feet



Area:

0.10

Acres



Mouse Navigation

Save

Clear







# Google Earth Pro

Ruler

Line

Path

**Polygon**

Circle

3D path

3D polygon

Measure the distance or area of a geometric shape on the ground

Perimeter: 617.13 Feet

Area: 0.50 Acres

Mouse Navigation

Save

Clear

