



DATE: July 10, 2023
TO: Silver Spring Design Advisory Panel (DAP)
FROM: Atara Margolies, Planner III, Downcounty Planning
RE: Staff comments for the July 19, 2023 DAP Meeting

This will be a hybrid meeting; attendees are welcome to participate virtually or in-person.

Note: This memo identifies initial staff issues and comments on the submitted designs. The purpose of the memo is to inform the panel members and the general public of potential design issues based on the Design Guidelines to be discussed during the DAP meeting. As part of the development review process, staff will make their own recommendations to the Planning Board regarding the required findings for conformance with the [Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Sector Plan](#) and the Design Guidelines, and overall compatibility, informed by the DAP's comments and vote.

Item #1

8676 Georgia Avenue

Roadside Development

Bonstra | Haresign, architect

Note: all page numbers below refer to the [Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan Design Guidelines](#).

Submission Overview:

This is the first Concept Plan submission, demonstrating overall massing and building orientation and approach to existing historic structure on the site. The project is located at the southwest corner of Georgia Avenue and Cameron Street. The project extends the full length of the block along Cameron Street between Georgia Avenue and Ramsey Avenue. This site is located in the Downtown North district. Cameron Street is a Downtown Street – Type B (p. 13) and is part of the Central Green Loop (p. 28).

The proposal is for a 300' tall high-rise residential building with ground-floor retail. Proposal is to replace existing single-use commercial building on site and to retain, relocate and restore the historic Tastee Diner restaurant at Cameron St and Ramsey Ave. The Tastee Diner is listed on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

Review of Proposal:

- The submitted documents show a 6-story base, a tower, and a setback at the 22nd floor to define the top with a cap at the 25th floor.
- The base is clearly defined at the western half of the building but is less defined as the building approaches Georgia Ave. The base is 6 stories throughout the entire building and does not appear to step down towards the townhomes to the west. The Design Guidelines recommend on p. 49 that where new construction is adjacent to low-rise buildings that the “base of new high-rise building should respond to the lower adjacent massing to the extent possible.”
- The proposed building has three frontages: Georgia Avenue, Cameron Street and Ramsey Avenue. Georgia Avenue is a Downtown Boulevard where a 15' minimum setback is recommended above the base. Cameron Street and Ramsey Avenue are both Downtown Streets (Type B) where a 10' minimum setback is recommended above the base. Proposed building is compliant with Design Guidelines along Ramsey (+/- 24' setback shown), but along Cameron there is only a 4' setback for half of the frontage. As the building approaches Ramsey it angles back from the street at the ground floor to accommodate the relocated Tastee Diner and provides a compliant setback above the base. Along Georgia Avenue there is no setback provided, but the frontage is very narrow and the tower corner extends down to the street as an architecturally significant corner, consistent with the Design Guidelines diagram on p. 105.
- The tower of the building is split into two towers, north and south. Some massing articulation is shown on the tower façades, but it is relatively limited. The building steps down from the north tower to the south tower along Ramsey Avenue as a nod to the townhomes immediately across the street at Ramsey Ave. For towers over 150' the Design Guidelines recommend secondary upper level setbacks to break up the massing of the tower (p. 53). The narrative describes that the two towers will be articulated with contrasting materials that are different from the base so that the building elements will be clearly differentiated (p. 46). The narrative also mentions that there will be a building top with an architecturally significant cap as recommended in the Design Guidelines (p. 56). At this Concept Plan submission there is not enough detail to discuss the façade treatment of the base or the tower relative to the Design Guidelines.
- The base of the building forms a street wall for much of the façade except at the northwest corner of the building where the base angles back to accommodate the relocated Tastee Diner. The upper floors of the base cantilever over the Diner and the expanded ground floor frontage zone created by the angled facade. The Design Guidelines recommend continuous street wall as much as possible (p. 49) and discourage cantilevers over public spaces (p. 48). The narrative explains that the building is angled away from the street to allow the Diner to become “a prominent street

activating element” and allows the open space created by the setback to be an “interpretative node.” The open space will include seating, plantings, and interpretative signage. Note that according to the Sector Plan and the zoning ordinance, this site is not required to provide open space and is instead asked to contribute via a payment another park in the district or the plan area.

- Service and parking entrances are off of Ramsey St. A ground floor plan showing building entrances was not submitted so it is unclear whether there will be an entrance along Georgia Ave. or only along Cameron St.
- Due to described site constraints, the applicant has located structured parking above-ground adjacent to the Verizon building that is immediately south of the site. The parking will be “architecturally treated through either a mural, decorative metal panel or similar design treatment.” Materials will vary along this façade. The Design Guidelines encourage below-ground parking (p. 62) and recommended that if this is not feasible, that above-ground parking be integrated fully into the design so that it is indistinguishable from the rest of the building façade.
- On pages 14-15 of the submission drawing package, it is clear that the proposed street section complies with the Cameron Street section in the Sector Plan, with a bike lane, tree buffer and sidewalk. However, on a Central Green Loop street trees and stormwater infrastructure should both be prioritized as much as possible (p. 29) and there is no indication that any stormwater management facility would be provided.
- Staff previously met with the applicant about this site and about Design Guidelines flexibility.
- As required by the Sector Plan, the applicant is requesting all 10 points for Exceptional Design.
- At this early submission there is not enough information to understand:
 - How the diner will be incorporated into the building design and how it will be treated in a manner appropriate to its historic designation;
 - How the façade treatment will differentiate base from tower where no step-back is shown;
 - How the above-grade parking will be treated such that it is “invisible” from the exterior.