



Silver Spring Design Advisory Panel – July 19, 2023, Meeting Notes

Revised July 21, 2023

8676 Georgia Avenue was reviewed by the Silver Spring Downtown Design Advisory Panel on July 19, 2023. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel members comments and thoughts regarding the design of the project. The project is in the Sketch Plan stage and the Design Advisory Panel asked the applicant team to return to the Panel once more during Sketch Plan to address the comments discussed below. For all questions and/or comments please contact the Design Advisory Panel Liaison.

Project:

8676 Georgia Avenue

Applicant: Roadside Development, with Bonstra | Haresign (architect) and additional consultants

Attendance:

Design Advisory Panel:

Bill Bonstra

David Cronrath

Alice Enz

Praj Kasbekar

Qiaojue Yu (virtual)

Note: As Bonstra | Haresign is a member of the applicant team, Bill Bonstra was present but recused himself from the project discussion.

Staff:

Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, Downcounty Planning

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor, Downcounty Planning

Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Design in the Director's Office

Atul Sharma, Assistant to the Deputy Director

Atara Margolies, Planner III

Grace Bogdan, Planner III (virtual)

Hyojung Garland, Supervisor, Long Range Planning Section, Park Planning & Stewardship Division

Henry Coppola, Development Review Coordinator, Park Planning & Stewardship Division

Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner, Park Planning & Stewardship Division

Applicant Team:

Stacy Silber, Lerch, Early and Brewer
Tiffany Bevel, Lerch, Early and Brewer (virtual)
Jeff Edelstein, Roadside Development
Brian Corcoran, Roadside Development (virtual)
William Ikeler, Roadside Development (virtual)
Ronnie Ali, Bonstra | Haresign
Zenairee Garcia, Bonstra | Haresign
Pradipto Banerjee, Bonstra | Haresign (virtual)
Jae Hong Ahn, Bonstra | Haresign (virtual)
Daniel Seidman, Bonstra | Haresign (virtual)
Trini Rodriguez, ParkerRodriguez
Patrick LaVay, MHG (virtual)

Meeting Notes:

Applicant team presented the project submission and included an additional exhibit that provided more detail on the proposed elevation design at the northeast corner of the building where Tastee Diner would be relocated. This exhibit was shown to Montgomery Planning Historic Preservation staff and the applicant team wanted to show it to the DAP as well.

Overall Building Massing

- It is a tight site, but the design does a good job of balancing between slab and tower. Panel acknowledges that it is difficult to fit a viable residential tower on this site.
- The canted approach at the corner of Ramsey Avenue and Cameron Street could be really successful as it gives a more perpendicular face to the approach on Cameron from the courthouse. However, the open space and the Diner at this important corner adjacent to the townhouses across Ramsey Avenue, is not sufficiently resolved.
- The stepback along Cameron Street is only 4', which is not sufficient and does not meet the Design Guidelines.
- The base along Ramsey Avenue does not sufficiently address the townhomes, it is too high and it does not step down enough in the southern direction. It undermines the move with the Diner because it is so large. Refer to Metro Tower in Bethesda as a precedent for a similar constrained site with a more successful massing approach.
- Consider the townhomes as an asset that will remain in the downtown long term, do not assume they will be redeveloped and therefore ignore them. Consider them both in terms of the massing on Ramsey Avenue, and the street-facing façade.
- There was a concern about shadows on the townhomes, but the applicant responded that due to the angle of the site, the shadows do not fall on the townhomes.
- There are a couple issues with the development's relationship to the Verizon building.

- Relationship of the tower to the Verizon building is awkward with the narrowing space between the new tower and the Verizon building getting narrower as it approaches Georgia Avenue.
- Because the tower is set back off of Georgia Avenue behind the Verizon front elevation, it highlights and calls attention to the Verizon building. This new building should be the most important elevation along Georgia Avenue.
 - *Applicant response: They reached out to Verizon, who was not interested in discussing any potential sale or air rights agreement. The substation is very much in use and will likely be for the foreseeable future.*

Georgia Avenue Façade

- What will the Georgia Avenue façade look like? It is a very important façade. It needs a stepback or some interesting façade treatment.
- The Panel understand that due to the site constraints a stepback along Georgia Avenue is not possible, but the current design emphasizes the corner at the Verizon substation to the south of the site, which is undesirable. Other treatments should be considered to emphasize the corner at Georgia Avenue and Cameron Street. Consider the corner of the PSFS building in Philadelphia as an example where the corner of the base is accentuated. Also consider other treatments including a reverse cantilever at this corner.
- Why isn't there an entrance on Georgia Avenue?
 - *Applicant response: Will depend on the retail tenant, because it is such a narrow façade it may not work.*
- The garage podium can really hinder street activation along Georgia Avenue. Could a liner of units be applied to the front of the garage podium to help activate this primary street without dramatically reducing the parking?

Treatment of Tastee Diner

- The building is so large and the Diner is so tiny; it seems out of place in the current proposed design. The diner is made to be so small in this context that it dramatically diminishes its historic importance. Somehow the Diner needs its own space.
- Explore placing the dining cab inside the lobby, where it could be more of an object in the ground floor space, rather than something alien that sticks out from the building façade. This would allow the building to create a continuous street wall at this very nice plaza. The Diner inside could be part of a larger café experience. The Diner inside could also be part of a larger display with public art at the outside plaza.
- The plaza could also become larger and the Diner could be an object within the plaza as a iconic kiosk (coffee shop) or something similar. The Diner could be more a part of the space (interior or exterior) rather than a part of the new building.
 - *Montgomery Planning Historic Preservation staff explained that they want the building to be visible, and that their main concern is what happens around the Diner at street level, they are not as concerned about what happens above.*

- The slightly recessed open space that the Diner sits under is very strange and overpowers the little building.
 - *Applicant response: Because of the way the building is angled you will see the Diner when you come down Cameron Street.*
- The panel did not agree that the diner will be heightened. The DAP thought the angled elevation was a very nice urban design move, but would not heighten the experience of the Diner. The Diner is too small and would likely never be seen from the Courthouse view and across landscape.
- Precedents to consider, both in Philadelphia: Sister Cities Café at Logan Circle and Cret Park at 16th St and Benjamin Franklin Parkway.
- How will the open space be programmed to work with the Diner?

Structured Parking and Service

- The parking levels should be hidden, they should not be accentuated. Bring the materials from the tower down to the parking levels so the parking is fully integrated and does not stick out as something completely different from what is happening in the tower. Refer to Ripley II at the southern end of the Ripley District in Silver Spring as a precedent for both treatment of parking façade and for how loading and service entrances are designed.
- Parking above-grade can make the base-middle-top distinction difficult, but if the parking is invisible in the base that will help.
- Explore if any units or other uses can line the parking, specifically along the edge at Georgia Avenue.
- The service and parking entrances are next to each other on the same façade; consider the impact on the neighbors and make these entrances as narrow and hidden as possible.
 - *Applicant response: Service and parking entrances are immediately facing the service entrance to the townhomes.*

Panel Recommendation:

- Panel would like this applicant to return again during Sketch Plan.
- Panel requests the following exhibits in addition to the required submission:
 - Ground floor plan showing programming and then upper parking levels so the Panel can understand the relationships within the base.
 - Parking plans with circulation diagrams.
 - Street level massing perspectives (with people) that show the relationship between the Diner and the proposed open space;
 - Street sections along Georgia Avenue, Cameron Street and Ramsey Avenue. Provide multiple sections where necessary to show different conditions, including people, trees and any buildings across the street.
 - Details of Georgia Avenue façade to understand how that will be treated.
 - More information about the open space so the Panel can understand how it relates to the Diner and what sort of experience/programming will be provided in this space.