



Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: 7025 Strathmore Street

DATE: September 27, 2023

The 7025 Strathmore Street project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on September 27, 2023. 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

Yulia Beltikova

Rod Henderer

Damon Orobona

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

Staff

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning

Atul Sharma, Director's Office

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Adam Bossi, Planner III

Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner

Rachel Newhouse, Parks Planner

Applicant Team

Faik Tugberk, Architects Collaborative

Chong Cho, Architects Collaborative

Christopher Ruhlen, Attorney

Andrew Kossow, Kossow Management Corp

Michael Miller, Gelman Group

Josh Sloan, Vika
Ian Duke, Vika

Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the first sketch plan presentation to the DAP. The review will focus on how the Applicant has addressed previous comments, general mass and bulk of the proposal and conformance with the Design Guidelines.

Panel:

General Comments

- I think this is a thoughtful, well-designed building and at sketch plan in terms of mass and bulk this is well on track and many of the comments are detail oriented and I think can continue to address at site plan.
- I think the facades are beautiful, I like the scale and the projection bays. Going back to the Design Guidelines we are trying to avoid projections over the bays, you said two feet, anything more than that would be an issue.
- Are there power lines on Strathmore Street?
 - *Applicant Response: Yes*
 - How does that impact the canopy corridor?
 - (Staff) All projects in Bethesda are undergrounding utilities so they will, and I believe there are utilities in the alley that will also need to be undergrounded.
 - If lines are undergrounded then we hope for large species canopy trees as dense as possible along the street edges.
- What is the setback at the southern end of the site?
 - *Applicant Response: The existing building to the south is 10 feet from the property line, the proposed building is setback 10 feet at the southern end with a portion of the building set back about 20 feet where an exposed plaza is planned.*
- Why couldn't you just have your layby in the parking zone like at the rest of the street frontage? Why do you have to bring it in further?
 - (Staff) Laybys will be dealt with during regulatory review, it will need to be reviewed by DOT and they are typically against these designs.
 - *Applicant Response: The quick answer is that it brings pedestrians closer to the building and we think its safer.*
 - This layby also minimizes the ability of creating a more spacious entry area to the building.

Through Block Connection

- What does the view corridor look like as you walk through from Wisconsin Avenue? It would be helpful to see that. Perhaps the applicant can draw a section and Nolli type plan from Wisconsin Avenue to Strathmore Street that can help explain the procession and help to clarify what is needed to maximize the public nature of this through block connection. In the partial plans and perspectives, it is not clear if the passage is inviting, open and public in presentation or character. This passage must clearly be public.
 - *Applicant Response: I would be happy to do that but there is quite a significant grade change from Wisconsin Avenue.*
 - I know about the grade change but the reason for asking is because, is your view blocked as you walk through there? In my mind this public pedestrian cut through is the big move and this development will greatly inform the future development on the west side of Strathmore Street. The gestures made from that development will take cues from what happens on this site.
- It's about 700 feet from Woodmont to the alley. Depending on how this is designed, the entire block in the future could be a long wall or it could look like a couple building blocks with this public passage somewhere in the middle. If you're asking what else you could do, in an extreme case I'd say leave this wide open to the sky. I think this gets to the Panel's point that this should look public not private.
 - *Applicant Response: I think this does look public. This is a huge expression at the street level, I respectfully disagree. We've created a very prominent cut through on a very small site.*
 - We are trying to understand how this would work and we would like additional information. It's not to say you are not doing it right. We just need more information.
- The Design Guidelines are clear that it should be public and that usually means open to the sky. I know there are practical concerns there, but we want to see what that sight line would look like.
 - *Applicant Response: We will get into that and maybe develop something more intricate. We are trying to create a compromise based on how the cut through aligns with Camille (7000 Wisconsin).*
 - I don't mind the building over it, we just need more information on how it looks. Quite frankly, it may be more powerful with the building above.
- It needs to visually read very public and I think for several reasons, one of them being the internal canopy being only one story, it compresses the space and makes it look semi private. Having a section and seeing the whole thing will inform how it can be designed more public.
 - *Applicant Response: I understand, the issue I have is that no matter which way you are coming, it is taking you to an alley*
 - The new building will have units fronting on that alley, so hopefully one day it looks a little nicer. The building adjacent to 7000 Wisconsin Avenue, they will need to contribute to the through block connection, is that right?

- (Staff) The front along 7000 Wisconsin Avenue has provided the full through block connection, the rear facing the alley will require the adjacent property owner to complete the alley connection at least another 13 feet in width.
- The height of the canopy within the through block connection plays an important role in that and if it is too low it is going to cut the view from the pedestrian, maybe it could cut into two heights?
- What is the plan for the ground level? Will the unit turn the corner and have windows? Will there be an emergency exit? We are just trying to understand what the space will be like.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes there will be an emergency exit. I was personally looking forward to a blank wall to incorporate some art, use it as a canvas for a backdrop.*

Base and Corner design

- Where is your building at the ground floor in relation to the build to line on Strathmore Street?
 - *Applicant Response: We are on the build to line.*
 - So all the bays and balconies project over?
 - *Yes, but it happens two stories above the plane, about 2 feet out.*
- The base along Strathmore Street, the proportions seem a little strange to me and I think there is maybe a simple solution where you make those first two stories like frame elements and more of a two-story expression.
 - *Applicant Response: One thing causing it to look odd is a 3-4 foot grade difference, so that greatly reduces the view.*
 - The horizontal middle spandrel splits the base into two distinct floors with the first floor feeling compressed. This is competing with the 2-story expression of the base. If the spandrel panel was minimized and a more “frame” expression was created at the first two floors, perhaps the base could read more like a 2-story expression rather than two compressed floors under the bays.
 - *Applicant Response: OK, we can work on that.*
- I debate whether the lobby is in the right place. The staff memo mentions moving the lobby entrance, I can see it in both ways. The ground floor on Woodmont is a couple feet below Woodmont Avenue right?
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, that’s right there will be a grade difference which is why we have the one entrance.*
 - (Staff) So is there an entrance off the alley?
 - *Applicant Response: No*
 - (Staff) So the portal on the alley is an ornamental view? The comment about the entrance is tied into the fact that the entrance is right off the lobby and wherever the entrance is should have a ceremonial entrance.
- Where the canopy sits on this prominent corner, it does not celebrate the beautiful lacework of mullions that you have, it squanders those proportions. Moving the canopy up to the main spandrel would adjust the proportion and hierarchy.

- The activation near the lobby area is important, the landscaping is beautiful but perhaps a seating area would be more appropriate. I understand the grade changes.
- It would be beneficial to have a section from the base of the curb on Strathmore Street through the building showing the ground floor and the bays above so we can fully understand how they overhang and how that effects the streetscape.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, we can do that.*

Panel Recommendations:

The Panel voted unanimously that the project is on track to receive a minimum of 10 design excellence points. At the time of Site Plan the Applicant should return with refinement based on the comments above including:

1. A section showing the view corridor from Wisconsin Avenue through the pedestrian connection to Strathmore Street;
2. A section from the curb on Strathmore Street through the building showing the relationship of the ground level patios and building footprint with bays projecting above.