



Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: 7749 Old Georgetown Road

DATE: July 26, 2023

The 7749 Old Georgetown Road project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on July 26, 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

Jonathan Fitch

Yulia Beltikova

Rod Henderer

Damon Orobona

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

Staff

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Planning Director

Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, DownCounty Planning

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Hyojung Garland, Parks Planner

Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner

Rachel Newhouse, Parks Planner

Applicant Team

Matt Gordon – Attorney

Jack Alexander -

Doug Firstenberg – Stonebridge

Chris Huffer – Architect, SK&I

Marius Radulescu – Architect, SK&I

Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the second sketch plan presentation to the DAP following up on the June 2023 meeting. 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

- Thank you for addressing the comments on how the building grounds. I look forward to seeing how those elements evolve in the next iteration as it looks rather 2d and the materials will hopefully bring dimensionality. The middle of the massing is more expressed where the corner turns to Old Georgetown Road.
- I appreciate how you've wrapped the building around.
- The most prominent element of the tower is the corner, yet the base is recessed without anything holding the large mass up, so it looks like its floating. It seems contrary to how we perceive gravity. Is there some other element that can help support the building corner at the ground so it doesn't seem like its floating?
 - *Applicant Response: What would you suggest? Once we add the glazing it will help balance the notion of solid versus open. One thing we were considering is that the retail corner will read differently at the base and it may interrupt that feeling of the tower coming to the ground. We are going to be articulating this in a way that is the singular element coming down and holding the corner.*
 - *(staff) The Guidelines are clear that we want four story bases and we want punctuation, you could bring elements down, or an opportunity to make the slim canopy more robust and perhaps it turns down at some point so it emphasizes a corner portal which it seems that's what you are attempting. Even aligning the angulation of the storefront with the building above could help. These are all small details but some suggestions to consider. There is just so much emphasis on this very strong vertical corner mass that it seems like it should come to the ground in one way or another. Currently, it is floating a floor up from the ground and it just seems very uncomfortable.*
- I disagree, I'm very enthusiastic about the corner and I am looking forward to the next iteration. I do not think it is a huge cantilever.

- *Applicant Response: It is about 5-6 feet.*
- There's a really nice refinement since we last saw it. A lot is going to depend on materiality and perhaps the corner becomes predominantly glass.
- There's a shadow line on the ground and the floor above along the podium at the Old Georgetown elevation, is that intentional? Is that a change in plane? Or could you bring it to the street level?
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, the shadow currently represents a slight change in plane. The goal is to have this material come down as much as possible, but we need to go a little further into detail to determine if that is feasible. There are two ways to ground, and we can look at both.*
- I suggest you come back with a couple options at the next level of review focusing on the ground plane.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, we have to give you the details and then we can see if the floating design is still a concern, we can even come with more ideas for this corner. A lot of people spend time at this corner and we want to get it right.*
 - *(staff) The street geometry is a precious relic of an older time, so it is a beautiful opportunity to make a tower with views that pivot around.*

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 options for the corner design based on the comments above.