



DATE: November 2, 2023

TO: Silver Spring Design Advisory Panel (DAP)

FROM: Atara Margolies, Planner III, Downcounty Planning

RE: Staff comments for the November 15, 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 design.. 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

Ellsworth Place Residential

GBT Realty

Gresham Smith, architect; VIKa, engineering

Submission Overview:

This is the first submission to the DAP. This project is in the Sketch Plan phase of the regulatory review process.

This submission demonstrates the overall massing of the building and its relationship to the existing base, the Ellsworth Place mall. The only proposed change to the base is to create a new residential entrance and lobby off of Colesville Road, no other renovations or improvements are proposed. The applicant does not discuss the streetscape of either Colesville Road or Fenton Street. Staff would like to see more significant improvements to the base that would strengthen the relationship between the street, the Base, and the Tower.

The location of the proposed tower meets the setback requirements in the Design Guidelines by stepping back a minimum of 15' along Colesville Road and Fenton Street. An upper secondary setback is shown, as encouraged in the Design Guidelines on p. 53.

The top of the building is differentiated through additional setbacks, and the accompanying narrative indicates that further differentiation will be expressed through changes in material and transparency.

While the narrative mentions a cap, it is not clear from the massing if the proposal includes an expressive or sculptural cap, which is something the Design Guidelines (p.56) encourages, particularly on tall buildings in prominent locations.

The proposal also includes select diagrammatic floor plans, along with illustrative images that show materials, amenities, and the proposed approach to the façade.

The submission includes many precedent photos, although none that appear to be a new tower on an older, existing base, and it is unclear how the tower and the base will be integrated, if at all. It would be helpful to see an example of a precedent project that is similar to what is proposed. The multi-story base is currently “dated” and would likely be significantly different from the new residential tower. At a minimum, some renovations of the base (perhaps to the façade/elevation) and some streetscape improvements will likely be necessary to identify and successfully market the new residential tower above, which is set back and partially hidden from Colesville Road and Fenton Street.

There is no proposed parking provided.

Additional Notes:

- The property is located in the Silver Spring Commercial Business District (CBD) Locational Atlas Historic District. Any alterations to properties within the District require, at a minimum, Historic Preservation Office (HPO) review to determine whether or not the proposal constitutes a substantial alteration to the District. If it is determined that the proposal is a substantial alteration, then it may also require the Historic Area Work Permit (HAWP) and approval from the HPC depending on the location and type of alteration proposed.
- In the application it indicates that the applicant expects to get 20 points for Exceptional Design. However, the maximum a project can achieve in downtown Silver Spring is 10 points.