



Silver Spring Design Advisory Panel – November 15, 2023, Meeting Notes

Revised November 15, 2023

This was the first presentation of the Ellsworth Place project to the DAP. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel members comments and thoughts regarding the design of the project. The DAP requested that the project for a second review during the Sketch Plan process. For all questions and/or comments please contact the Design Advisory Panel Liaison.

Project:

Ellsworth Place

GBT Realty, with Gresham Smith – architect; VIKA - engineer

Attendance:

Design Advisory Panel:

Bill Bonstra

David Cronrath

Alice Enz (virtual)

Praj Kasbekar

Qiaojue Yu (virtual)

Staff:

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor, Downcounty Planning

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

Atul Sharma, Assistant to the Deputy Director

Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, Downcounty Planning (virtual)

Atara Margolies, Planner III

Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner, Park Planning & Stewardship Division (virtual)

Applicant Team:

Gus Bauman, Beveridge and Diamond, P.C.

Trey Culpepper, GBT Realty

Brandon Bell, Gresham Smith

Jennie LeNoue, Gresham Smith (virtual)

Deepa Limaye, Gresham Smith (virtual)

Joshua Sloan, VIKA (virtual)

Ian Duke, VIKA

Esra Soytutan, VIKA (virtual)

Meeting Notes:

Project Background

The applicant team presented an overview of the project including site plan, structural issues, overall massing and approach to residential tower. Presentation included preliminary 3D massing views of the tower on top of the existing mall. When the 1991 mall building was constructed, the roof was designed to structurally support a commercial tower that fronted on Colesville Road. The proposed residential tower location is limited by the structural system that will allow for a building on top of the roof of the 1990's addition to the original Hecht's Building. The proposed project does not, at this time, propose any changes to the mall other than the introduction of a residential lobby at the southern end of the Colesville Road front elevation, where the proposed office tower entrance was envisioned. The proposed massing adheres to the stepbacks per the Design Guidelines.

There was a lot of support for a residential tower in this part of downtown Silver Spring and nearly all DAP members reiterated that.

Overall Massing

The discussion was focused on the overall massing of the building and its relationship to the existing mall base and to the ground street level. There was consensus among the DAP members that the tower needs to have a direct relationship to the street.

The DAP asserted that there needs to be a strong relationship between the tower and the base, which is shown in all the applicant's residential tower precedents. The tower should somehow come down to the ground via façade renovation and redesign. Several members pointed to the bottom right precedent image provided by the applicant on p. 18 of the submission where one can see the façade design of the tower extend through the base and down to the ground.

The DAP also mentioned that while the proposal does comply with the required stepbacks, perhaps the massing could be simpler and somewhat less articulated, by emphasizing one element of the "L" or "T" shape over the other, thus establishing a hierarchy in the massing. The applicant should consider aligning the primary "bar" of the residential tower along the southern alley wall area (either directly at the wall or set back) with secondary "arms" facing out towards the north and south. The relationship to the billboard-heavy mall entrance at Fenton Street and Colesville Road should also be studied more to see if the billboard design needs to change and/or how the tower will be seen from the north as well as from the corner retail entry courtyard. Currently, only a single point of the tower corner touches the courtyard elevation.

The panel recommended moving the amenity floor from the top of the building to the first floor of the tower above the existing mall base roof by creating an amenity podium level that would be a strong transition from the retail base of the mall to the tower. The amenities of party rooms, workout rooms, a pool and/or terraces could all be incorporated onto the roof of the podium which may be less complicated from a structural (and cost) perspective. The podium would be an effective buffer between the roof of the mall and the residential units in the tower. The "top" of the tower could then

be larger high-end units with sweeping views. This would also mitigate some of the challenges of the lower units looking directly out on the roof of the mall.

Relationship to the Adjacent Alley

The alley was discussed as a challenge, both from an aesthetic standpoint and its relationship to the tower above, and in terms of loading and service operations, as it would be shared with the adjacent users. The south tower elevation that will align with the alley will be a prominent façade that will be highly visible from Colesville Road. It should be designed in a distinctive way that should not be similar in material or design to the base below that faces directly onto the alley. In the proposed plans the elevator tower runs along this façade. This is an opportunity to turn the elevator shaft into a design element, as it will be highly visible.

Panel Recommendation

The DAP requested that the applicant return to the panel during the Sketch Plan process with drawings and 3D views that respond to the comments from the November meeting.

Additional Notes:

- The DAP requested that the following exhibits be provided at the next submission:
 - Plan diagram delineating the original Hecht's building and the 1991 addition.
 - 3D massing model and plan diagram showing the extent of the originally proposed office tower above the base mall.
- The DAP also raised the question of whether or not the applicant would be required to do streetscape improvements, given that they are not building a base. Planning staff responded that this will be determined during Sketch Plan review, and they do not have an answer at this time.
- The mall building is listed on the Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites. This project will likely require a Historic Area Work Permit, but, as the proposed tower is on the 1991 portion of the building and is nowhere near the historic façade, there should be no issue with modifications to the Colesville Road side of the building.