


DATE: November 21, 2023

TO: Bethesda Downton Plan Design Advisory Panel (DAP)

FROM: Grace Bogdan, Planner III, Downcounty Planning   
Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor, Downcounty Planning  
Atul Sharma, Assistant to the Deputy Director, Director's Office  
Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Designer, Director's Office

RE: Staff comments for the November 29, 2023 DAP Meeting

This will be a hybrid meeting, attendees can participate in person or virtually.

Both items to be discussed at this meeting will contribute to redevelopment that will provide for the Bethesda Downtown Sector Planned Eastern Greenway. The County underwent a Request for Development Proposals process for the redevelopment of County Parking Lots #25 and #44. The RFDP was awarded to a joint venture, with each Lot to be developed separately according to the terms of a General Development Agreement with the County, and are the subject of both items at this month's meeting.

Aside from the County Owned parking lots, 8001 Wisconsin Avenue was recently approved by the Planning Board for a Sketch Plan and Preliminary Plan, which is located on the block between Lots #25 and #44, and 4702 West Virginia Avenue was previously approved for a Sketch Plan and Site Plan, which is adjacent to County Parking Lot #44. The Eastern Greenway's vision is discussed in the Sector Plan (Page 84) and Design Guidelines (Page 100), and the Parks Department has also created a framework for the future Greenway. The DAP's scope is focused on the relationship of the proposed development to the Greenway and the nearby redevelopment along the Greenway.

## Item #1

### Lot #25

Torti Gallas Architects  
Parker Rodriguez

- 1<sup>st</sup> Sketch Plan presentation to the DAP, focusing on high-level conformance of building massing and urban design.
- The proposal includes up to 230,000 square feet of residential development, 145 public parking spaces, and 93' in width dedication for the Eastern Greenway as a public park.
- The Applicant is requesting Alternative Treatment in lieu of providing the recommended stepback of 15-20 feet on Highland Avenue.
- The main pedestrian entrance is proposed off Highland Avenue with a staircase leading to views of the interior east/west oriented courtyard with floors above (referred to as a 'bridge').

Staff has previously recommended the massing of the upper floors be grounded as the 'bridge' seems heavy and views through a glass enclosed passageway would be negligible from the street.

- In the provided sections it seems the primary views within the courtyard will be towards properties lining Wisconsin Avenue to the west over a two-story building mass. Future redevelopment along Wisconsin Avenue would result in the back of buildings facing into the courtyard. If the rectangular courtyard were oriented in a north/south orientation with the open end towards the south, rather than west, the views would be street facing and the courtyard will receive significantly more sunlight during the year, particularly in the winter months.
- Staff recommends in future submissions that the Applicant provide street level renderings showing the impact of the below grade parking and a partially raised first floor along the site frontages.
- The Applicant is requesting 20 points for exceptional design.

#### **Item #2 Lot #44/4702 West Virginia Avenue**

Torti Gallas Architects

Parker Rodriguez

- 1<sup>st</sup> Sketch Plan amendment presentation, focusing on high-level conformance of building massing and urban design.
- A Sketch and Site Plan were previously approved for 4702 West Virginia Avenue, which is adjacent to the existing County Parking Lot #44. The previous approval allowed for a 35' tall condominium building with 19 units. These approvals will require amendments for the new proposal of 51 multifamily dwelling units (condominiums) with underground parking and a 43' wide Eastern Greenway.
- The current loading and parking access results in the main lobby being isolated between the service bay entrances and should be relocated. Staff recommends access and/or loading be entirely from alleys whenever possible. If neither access points cannot be achieved from the alley, the parking entrance should be moved closer to the loading bay to the west to avoid additional curb cuts and relocation of the lobby.
- The entrance to the corner townhouse on West Virginia Avenue should be oriented towards the street to help activate the street frontage. If possible, the corner townhouse at the park should also be oriented towards the Park to the south to help activate that frontage.
- The setback eastern elevation of the apartment building behind the townhouses is very horizontal, monolithic, and overpowering of the townhouse elevations below. The scale and proportionality of the bays should be softened to improve the relationship with the new park and single-family neighborhood to the east. Rather than a large rectangular form with long balconies within, perhaps the back elevation could feature a rhythm of vertical bays that break up the scale of the large elevation and are sympathetic to the rhythm of the townhouse bays in front.

- The proposed precedent images for the townhouses and larger building seem to conflict each other. The overall design should be more cohesive and weave elements and materials of both the townhouse buildings and apartment building together.
- The Applicant is requesting 20 points for exceptional design.

**Design Excellence Guide:**

- *10 Points: Generally consistent with the Design Guidelines and meets four of the CR Guideline Criteria*
- *20 Points: Superlative design that in a uniquely compelling way meets the Design Guidelines or overcomes a significant site or similar constraint; a top example of design within Montgomery County*
- *30 Points: Singular design that exemplifies the highest intent of the Design Guidelines and may be considered a top example of design within the Mid-Atlantic region*