



# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** Lot #25

**DATE:** November 29, 2023

### **Attendance:**

#### Panel

Jonathan Fitch

Yulia Beltikova

Rod Henderer

John Tschiderer

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

#### Staff

Atul Sharma, Assistant to the Deputy Director

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning

Adam Bossi, Planner III

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Rachel Newhouse, Parks Planner

Henry Coppola, Parks Planner

Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner

#### Applicant Team

Matt Gordon

Bob Dalrymple

Russel Hines

Jeremy Souders

Jonathan Johnson

Trini Rodriguez

#### Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the first sketch plan presentation to the DAP. The review will focus on general mass and bulk and conformance with the Design Guidelines and revisions based on the first round of comments.

Panel:

#### General

- On the west, how far is your building setback?
  - *Applicant Response: There is a 10' paper alley that the building touches up against. The alley is public.*
- What is the process for this one?
  - *Applicant Response: This will be reviewed as just a Sketch Plan and then will file a Site Plan separately.*
- Is the landscape architect the same for all three sites? The only thing that seems missing is how the landscaping is all being knit together.
  - *Applicant Response: Yes, the two sites today and the site in between all feature the same architect and landscape architect.*
  - (staff) When this moves forward the Planning Board will want to see how each these tie together holistically.

#### Massing Orientation

- I think we should talk about the orientation of the courtyard, did you look at orienting it in a different direction so that the long distance tracks north/south rather than east/west? Also, in all likelihood, someone will redevelop along Wisconsin Avenue and block your primary opening within the courtyard. Their building will be a less desirable back elevation.
  - *Applicant Response: Well, we did think about it. They would in all likelihood build an I or C shape massing and we put that into a sun study. That study doesn't show much light going into a North/South oriented courtyard. Also, in order to maximize our density those units that face the alley would not be very enjoyable and would feature less glass on a double loaded corridor. The 5pm sun study shows the same percent of sun it would at 2pm, with a south facing façade it would be complete shade. So, we thought the east/west courtyard actually provides the most sun.*
  - *Applicant Response: We had the two owners under contract for the properties facing Wisconsin Avenue, but unfortunately, they are not on the same timeline because of the GDA. So, after our first meeting with staff that showed the massing more as a donut, the comment about the blank wall really bothered us and we feel strongly about the west opening, partly because we know how the units would be better suited and would not lose as much density. We agree with staff's comments that intuitively it should be otherwise but after we studied it, we do think this is the best orientation.*

- (staff) Did you study how the sun/shade would look if you had the opening onto the park rather than the street? Because if you are really trying to connect the public to the semi-private, the entrance from the street doesn't really help. But opening the courtyard onto the greenway may, and then the western light would flow through.
  - *Applicant Response: We did not study that, but it is an interesting thought for sure.*
- At the entrance from the courtyard from Highland Avenue, who is using that entrance? Would it be residents who just go directly to the courtyard rather than their apartment? With the elevation into the courtyard being significantly higher, do you have a view or section that shows what one would even see from the street level? I just don't get the point with what you are showing. Other than possibly being able to look up and into the courtyard from the street, why is it there? I suspect most residents will never use this entrance.
  - *Applicant Response: It is definitely more of a visual connection rather than convenience. We've done some studies to make a bridge connection like Bethesda Row, it has become less important of a connection.*
- I think it is a nice connection, other buildings in Bethesda have a similar entry and gives the possibility for other events to happen in the courtyard that may be for the larger community. But I do think it is important how the entrance is articulated at the street level to help activate the street.
- The problem could be that nobody ends up using those stairs and it becomes an unused place for trash and candy wrappers.
  - *Applicant Response: We have thought about that to and are considering moving the façade to the street to make the recess an inside space.*
- If that outdoor space is associated to the lobby I can see that space being more used and activated. Currently, it is not associated with the primary entry.
- I'd like to reinforce this entrance into the courtyard, I am very intrigued with it being off the Greenway rather than the street, it seems a bit residual to be off the street. I agree after seeing the studies that the western orientation is better, but I would like to see diagrams and a view of the entrance off the Greenway.
- About two thirds of the building footprint really needs to be paid attention to, and it seems pretty insensitive from a site plan perspective. The parking plinth and the blank low wall could be very unattractive to pedestrians or the overall streetscape.
- The elevator and building core seems a bit off and would be difficult for the residents that are coming in with groceries and such.
  - *Applicant Response: Yes, you've pointed out a big design flaw we are working on internally. Those are double sided elevators if that helps, but we have about 230 units and would like to see +/- 1 elevator for 80 units so it is a building that demands three elevators, we need one by the loading and then we wanted two closer to Highland Avenue and then if we did, one may be 'orphaned' so we tried to unify the elevator banks. We also wanted to make sure residents didn't have to walk too far from their units.*

- In my view, two cores work all day long. You are always going to have a long travel distance for some. If you were to move the two elevators then you could make the connection to the greenway.
  - *You make a good point. We would need to rethink the first two floors and we can look at it. Rethinking the connection to the Eastern Greenway would take some work and impacting many other components. It's a dimensionally challenging problem but we can think about it.*
- Are you proposing any artwork for the site and/or the building?
  - *Applicant Response: No, not right now. We mentioned it in the sense that we are hoping to have artistic elements in the Park, but we are currently not seeking public art points.*
  - I realize there is a lot to be talked about with the Greenway and the character of all that open space is fairly undetermined. The programming is very important given its location.
  - *We analyzed what exists in the area and general open space is badly missing. We want as much open space as possible but are not thinking active recreational space. We believe mostly passive space through the creation of strong promenade aspects will be the most important part.*
  - Who maintains these greenway spaces?
  - (Parks staff) These two will become actual Park's Department parkland, but 8001 Wisconsin will remain privately owned. We have a goal of having this northern end as open space.
  - If that's the case, then having an opening onto the Park from the adjacent property and streets seems much more important.

#### Base

- Did you consider moving the garage down a couple feet to avoid having the garage above grade?
  - *Applicant Response: At the highest point on Highland Avenue, it is about 5-6 feet above grade. We can put some planting in front of the garage.*
- What is weird is where you can't put a planter in front of the bump, like on Maple Avenue?
  - *Applicant Response: We can make a small porch area with railing, and there is about 3 feet we will be able to put a hedge, just enough to soften the edge and the balconies above.*
- Currently, you show a single-story base on Maple with 2 stories set back above and then the rest of the building set back from that. Why not just provide a three-story base at Maple Avenue? I think that would have a better relationship to the single-family houses on the other side. I would love to see a perspective rendering at Maple Avenue.
- It would be good to see the east elevations (of the 3 new developments) drawn together so we can see the overall composition of the new park elevation.

- *Applicant Response: I understand, but that would be difficult and look like a lie because the planes are not aligned. Each block of the Eastern Greenway will have a different depth. I agree we could show all the masses together.*
- Please provide a more detailed massing drawing of the 3 buildings so we can see their relationship to each other and how they frame, or become gateways to the intersecting streets.

**Panel Recommendations:**

The Panel requested the Applicant return with diagrammatic floor plans showing options with an entrance into the courtyard from the Eastern Greenway and more detailed drawings/diagrams of how the building will relate to the adjacent streets with the parking plinth raising up out of the site.

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## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** Lot 44/4702 West Virginia Avenue

**DATE:** November 29, 2023

### **Attendance:**

#### Panel

Jonathan Fitch

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

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Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner

#### Applicant Team

Matt Gordon, Attorney

Bob Dalrymple, Attorney

Jason Weinstein, Developer

Shane Crowley, Developer

Jeremy Souders, Architect

Jonathan Johnson, Architect

Trini Rodriguez, Landscape Architect

#### Discussion Points:

Staff: This is a concept level plan to just receive comments from the DAP prior to submitting any regulatory applications. It is the Applicant's intent to subsequently submit as a Speed to Market and will have a consolidated Sketch Plan and Site Plan review.

Panel:

### General Comments

- We are very excited to see these projects come through, given the Master Plan vision in this area, it is really exciting to see.

### Compatibility

- I'd like to talk about the concept of compatibility between the "townhouse" mass and the taller apartment/condo mass behind. As a diagram it definitely, has a strong start, but the massing actually lacks compatibility that's almost uncomfortable to me as an architect. I realize that these could be two different developments that happen in an urban environment but in this particular case, I thought this was strange.
- The townhouse elevations are oriented in a more vertical design while the taller building behind is overtly horizontal in design. It completely overpowers the nicely proportioned townhouses in front.
  - *Applicant Response: Good point, and I think there is a lot we can do to integrate the designs. I think it was hard for us to come up with a townhouse design we liked and match it. You are right, we have not gotten there.*
- I agree, the upper and lower portions do not match or relate to each other at all.
- From a developer perspective, it's a bit disjointed. The townhouses are three stories with a roof terrace and a partial story. On slide 21, if I understand correctly, that internal amenity space is entirely dark with no access to natural light?
  - *Applicant Response: Yes, clearly that could not be units so we need to figure out exactly what that will be but there are amenity opportunities we think can be there that don't need natural light.*
  - I'm not questioning the amount, rather the quality. That is a large amount of area for only artificial light. Is there not a way to do gunslot windows from the townhouse space to get natural light into the amenity space? I'd really like to find a way to reorient that space to get some sort of natural light.
  - *We would have to figure that out, not sure how? But maybe we could push the townhouse space forward, in theory, but then there is a small gap they would be looking into? You're right, it's a challenge. Does the partial area of the 3<sup>rd</sup> story not cover the full width? I hear you and maybe that's the answer.*
  - I'm thinking about your quality and your sell side. Personally, we've had a dark space and it did not deliver well.
  - *Valid point, we have not solved that, but I hear you. What makes the most sense without compromising the townhouses themselves? Its also a tough code challenge with providing wood frame next to the concrete building. We can study that.*
  - Other than modifying the townhouses, maybe you can slide the amenity space a bit to the south and move the adjacent units to the north and west. By doing

that, you may be able to grab some natural light from the south and perhaps a narrow view to the adjacent park.

- *That's interesting. We will have to see the amount of the width we are using to the west. I like where you are going. Reorienting the stair is a good thought.*
- If you measure from the loading to the townhouse, a predominant amount, about two thirds is for access and loading and very likely will not be used often. That is a very harsh treatment at the street level. I would possibly remove the loading and move the lobby closer to the Benihana and not keep it in the middle like it is shown. Loading of condominiums can perhaps occur from on-street parking during the very infrequent times someone may be moving in or out.
  - *Applicant Response: We tend to agree it's a difficult problem, if there's unique circumstances, we may be able to consider a waiver for the loading. In the original proposal we had an on-street loading area to accommodate loading and we may consider doing that again. We need to meet with staff and DOT.*
  - I'd like to see that.

#### *Relationship with the Greenway*

- The Greenway is a bit more like a mews because of the existing single-family dwelling facing the eastern street. It seems to me that most people walking from the park going north will walk along the street rather than mid-block along the townhouses. Any planting on there will be on public land. Perhaps the townhouses should have a more substantial front yard planting since it is already taken out of the public ROW. I would like the public space to be as gracious as possible.
  - *Applicant Response: I hear you but the way it is integrated, the intent is for it to be very public. It will be publicly dedicated land and will follow a master planned vision. We have designed it so the townhouses can have a substantial green rooftop area. We are actually proposing the opposite of what you suggest and are trying to make it as public as possible. There isn't a sidewalk along Tilbury Street so this will provide a connection that lacks there today.*
  - (Parks staff) that is also the stance of Parks as it's a master planned promenade.
- I think the problem is that the first-floor plan is not really what you are suggesting, because this puts the trees next to the single-family property and I think you'd rather want the trees next to the pathway. I think you have to think about this promenade in the long term.
  - *Applicant Response: Correct, this first floor plan diagram was created without any landscape architecture in mind. If you look at the landscape diagram it was envisioned to swing it around. The park as it exists today is a bit hidden, if we open up the park – and we are contributing to the redevelopment of that park – it will be better integrated and connected into the Greenway strip. We will be working with Parks to completely renovate the existing Park to the south, this is incredibly important to the community.*



### Members of the Public

- We are very appreciative to both this project and the previous item, they have been very communicative with the community. We also appreciate many comments from the DAP today.
- Both of these projects have really listened to our comments, and we appreciate that.

### **Panel Recommendations:**

This is a concept plan and the DAP will see the Project again when they submit for Sketch Plan.