




DATE: March 20, 2024

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 March 27, 2024 DAP Meeting

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

Item #1 Lot #44/4702 West Virginia Avenue

Torti Gallas Architects

Parker Rodriguez

- This is a Speed to Market Project and as such, the Sketch Plan and Site Plan level of review will be conducted simultaneously. Site Plan review focuses on more detailed and developed architectural expression and site design, consistent with the Design Guidelines and determination of design excellence points.
- The Project is part of the General Development Agreement between the County and Developers to redevelop Parking Lot #25 and #44. This Project includes Lot #44 and 4702 West Virginia Avenue, which already has received Sketch Plan and Site Plan approval in 2020 (with review through the DAP) for a smaller scale project, to be amended in this process.
- The redevelopment will provide deeply affordable MPDUs as well as a 43'6" wide dedication and construction of the Eastern Greenway with enhancement of Chase Avenue Urban Park.
- The DAP reviewed this concept in November of 2023, meeting notes are attached to this memo. At this meeting, the DAP focused on improving the compatibility of the lower townhouse mass to the taller units above, potentially removing the loading from West Virginia Avenue to improve the pedestrian experience, and options to provide more light and air to the interior amenity space on the fifth floor.
- The revised submission shows refinements to the massing with a stronger relationship between the lower apartments to the building above and a modified layout that provides exterior light and area for the amenity space. The loading has been removed from the Site and the Applicant will be providing space along the West Virginia Avenue right-of-way for short term drop offs/pick ups and loading activities.
- West Virginia Avenue is classified as a Neighborhood Local Street, recommending a 15-20 foot stepback above the base. The Applicant is requesting alternative treatments for a smaller stepback of 5 feet along this frontage, with utilization of limiting apparent face as mitigation in lieu of a larger stepback. Given that the taller portion of the building subject to the stepback is of a limited width (approximately 93 feet), and that a portion of the building

will remain at approximately 43 feet in height, staff agrees a reduced stepback is appropriate.

- Certain enhancements could strengthen the townhouse base fronting on West Virginia Avenue such as articulation using bays, a secondary entrance, and/or Juliet balconies and additional glazing to increase the window to wall ratio, particularly at the corner. Any improvements to this corner should also be considered for the corner unit facing south towards Chase Avenue Urban Park.
- Staff recommends an additional submission to the DAP showing a greater level of detail including colored renderings and elevations with material call-outs to support further review.
- A refined layout for the Eastern Greenway design has also been provided with the submission, showing unit entrances fronting on to a meandering path with seating areas that will connect to Chase Avenue Urban Park to the south. This design will be finalized in coordination with Parks during the application review. However, the DAP should focus on landscaping treatments elsewhere on the Site, including along sidewalks, the amenity terrace level, and rooftop level. Landscaping plans with paving and plant material call outs should be provided showing improvements for the Site and amenity space.
- 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*



Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: Lot 44/4702 West Virginia Avenue

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

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Adam Bossi, Planner III

Rachel Newhouse, Parks Planner

Henry Coppola, Parks Planner

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 3rd 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.