Montgomery Planning
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

2425 Reedie Drive
Floor 14
Wheaton, MD 20902

MontgomeryPlanning.org

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: **7749 Old Georgetown Road**

DATE: June 26, 2024

Attendance:

Panel
Yulia Beltikova
Rod Henderer
Robert Sponseller
John Tschiderer
Jonathan Fitch
Paul Mortensen, ex officio member, Chief Urban Designer in the Director's Office

Staff
Stephanie Dickel, Downcounty Regulatory Supervisor
Grace Bogdan, Planner III
Henry Coppola, Parks Planner
Cristina Sassaki, Parks Planner

Applicant Team
Matt Gordon – Attorney
David Cerniglia – Stonebridge Associates
Doug Firstenberg – Stonebridge Associates
Chris Huffer – Architect, SK&I
Sami Kirkdill – Architect, SK&I
Marius Radulescu – Architect, SK&I
Steve Sattler – Landscape Architect, Parker Rodriguez

Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the 1st presentation before the DAP for a Site Plan level of review. The discussion should focus on detailed architectural design and determination of design excellence points.

Panel:

General

- I appreciate you bringing in the column, so it isn't floating in space.
- The retail looks really solid. If the retail turns to café or restaurant, is there space outdoors for tables?
    - *Applicant Response:* I think we cannot place outdoor tables there.
    - (staff) I believe you could add tables within the Property boundary and frontage zone. In the end, it would be nice to have outdoor café seating and we believe there is room for that.
- I think this is a handsome and clever building.
- Geometrically it looks very dynamic, I am happy to see this iteration, but I agree with the recommended tweaks to the base.
- I believe the Woodmont Triangle district is predominantly a masonry district which should be embraced, yet but the materials chosen are glass and steel, an art deco approach, which I respect.
- I find the building to be an ambitious geometric exercise. As you know, once angles are introduced into the building, much needs to be resolved as architects. I applaud the expressionist architectural approach.
- What system are you considering for the skin? A Unitized System? Will it be very thin?
    - *Applicant Response: Yes, it will be thin at about 3-4 inches.*
    - So, therefore, it's not a rainscreen system?
    - *Correct.*

Landscaping

- Are you preserving existing trees or are they all new?
    - *Applicant Response: The trees are all new.*
- What are the tree species?
    - *Applicant Response: Elm on St Elmo Avenue and Oak on Old Georgetown Road.*
    - Is there a reason you can't get a second tree on Old Georgetown Road?
    - *There is a vault and transformer that is restricting the tree placement, as we are trying to keep those utilities out of the pedestrian through zone.*
    - Is there a size caliper you are proposing?
    - *We can look at a tad larger, maybe 4-4.5", the difficulty is fitting the root ball.*

    - Maybe you could get to 7" given the large tree bed.
- What is the step out on St Elmo Avenue?
    - *Applicant Response: It is 1 foot.*
    - People are going to have to walk on that to get around the planters, you may want to give that some thought.
- The planters at the base of the building are spotty, quite thin and not large. It will likely be difficult to plant any meaningful plants in these small spaces.
    - *Applicant Response: We are trying to respond to the canopy corridor recommendations of the Sector Plan. Is your preference to get rid of them?*
    - Yes. I think it is better to have more room to walk along the street than to slightly respond to the idea of a canopy corridor.

St Elmo Avenue Façade

- Are you taking the metal material to the base on St Elmo Ave where the loading is?
    - *Applicant Response: Yes, the metal panel will come down and meet a 1' tall granite base. Within the loading area we are proposing a hard material/masonry, but we want it to match the color scheme to blend in.*
    - I am happy to hear the granite, the paneling could wear and be easily damaged over time.
- This seems like a really strong expression on a tough corner, on page 29, the dimensions from the face of curb to the building, what is the dimension?
    - *Applicant Response: It is 15' at the closest point but it further recesses another 2.5' where the invert occurs. On Old Georgetown Road, the closest point is 25' and then further recesses back another 5' at the corner.*
    - So if there are 270 units, that front entry is going to be really busy, not to mention the deliveries for the building. My concern on St Elmo Avenue is that it's an already busy street. Have you studied a drop off on St Elmo Avenue?
    - (staff) There are bike lanes proposed on St Elmo Avenue, so even if the Applicant were to propose it there isn't support for that from MCDOT or Planning staff.
    - I just want to express how busy St Elmo Ave already is and this is going to add more. The deliveries will go right through the landscape bed to the lobby.
    - Do we need the two left turn lanes at this intersection onto Old Georgetown Road? Maybe they can repurpose one to add more space for deliveries, parking and "breathing room" for daily uses at the building. Hopefully this modification can be achieved as there does not seem to be a significant amount of need for 2 left turn lanes on St. Elmo Avenue.
    - (staff) That can be reviewed with the Preliminary Plan.
- The sidewalk in front of Bloomingdales is 8 feet and this is nothing like that, we will be ok without laybys. We do not want to see laybys.

Old Georgetown Road Façade

- In terms of setback, I have no issues with the reduced tower setback. If you can make it work that's great.
    - *Applicant Response: Yes, any separation past 15' we can do 75% glazing.*
- I think the design has come along nicely, but I do have some comments. To me the St Elmo Avenue massing and articulation is highly disciplined and resolved. I like how the articulation connects to the base. However, when you wrap around to Old Georgetown Road, the discipline falls apart to me. It seems more random and I'm wondering if you could make it more sophisticated and disciplined with resolving the geometry.
    - *Applicant Response: The geometry is mostly the same.*
    - If you look at the floor plans for the base and then top, there is a repetition on St Elmo Avenue. On Old Georgetown Road you can see it is more random and the articulated portion of the elevation just appears from the vertical corner element. I'm suggesting some simplification on Old Georgetown Road to solve the problem. Could the articulated continuation of the St. Elmo elevation have a more pronounced shift from the corner tower skin element so it does not just appear from that corner skin?
- I agree, it's a tough site, and I think a lot of thought has happened to get to this point. If you look at page 6, when you don't see the base carried across, I think that's when it falls apart. There is not enough contrast to pick up on the ribbon, I think that's the issue. So maybe it's something you can do with color. If it's not possible with color, at the very top of the building you break the rule, maybe you could do that at the 6th story to visually tie the base from St Elmo Avenue to Old Georgetown Road?
    - *Applicant Response: You're right, it is a short façade, and it puts some constraints to recreating the same geometry. Maybe we could add some color on this corner (page 12) I do see the repetitive nature of it.*
    - In a way, it's a little editing to strengthen the design.
- I second the comments already stated, I think there is a little clutter that could be simplified. The balconies are cluttering the massing and there are so many. The top balcony on the right corner of Old Georgetown Road, removing that and doing a larger setback could help. The square balconies woven into the weave disrupt the fluidity of the design. Balconies are hard to resolve, and I think the French balconies also disrupt the overall composition, can they be done more simply?

Corner/roof Treatment

- Is the corner amenity area at the top of the building covered? Some renderings show it covered and others do not.
    - *Applicant Response: We are still finalizing the details and the plan is to integrate a trellis, but it won't go to the edge of the building.*

    - Since it will not be totally covered, I think that's the one weak spot of the building. I don't think the building needs it at the corner top. I don't think it enhances the user experience or the building.
- Can you explain the objective and goal of the top? Help me understand how we got to this shape?
    - *Applicant Response: The shape is derived from the chevron façade design. We think having that subtle butterfly chevron integrates into the rest of the angular roof is a positive move. I think it's important to have a taller element at the corner, especially at this high visibility location. Given the verticality of the building, we are trying to take the art deco piers up and further tie into the back of the penthouse to anchor down the façade. It needs to be proud of the rest of the penthouse and create the sense of space; an outdoor room. The trellis will help create that dynamic sense of amenity architecture when experiencing the roof of the building from the top and from looking at it from afar.*
- I think the corner feels flimsy, I think the top could be removed or strengthened.
- The coloring seems muddy, as there are 3 subtle colors. I think using just one color or adding more contrast to the 3 colors would help.

Panel Recommendations:

The DAP requested the Applicant to refine the project based on the comments above, specifically for the Old Georgetown Road façade and the corner top element. The primary issue is a refinement of the Old Georgetown Road elevation so that the sophistication and discipline of the St. Elmo Avenue elevation wraps around to Old Georgetown Road. Although some thought the top corner was too much, others appreciated the strong gesture at this highly visible location. The Applicant should further explain their intent at the corner and clarify their design idea.