



DATE: October 9, 2024
TO: Silver Spring Design Advisory Panel (DAP)
FROM: Atara Margolies, Planner III, Downcounty Planning
RE: Staff comments for the October 16, 2024, DAP Meeting

This will be a hybrid meeting; attendees are welcome to participate virtually or in-person.

Item #1

8676 Georgia Avenue

Roadside Development

Bonstra | Haresign, architect

Submission Overview:

This is the third submission to the DAP. This project is in the Site Plan phase of the regulatory review process. Note that this project is under review by the DAP as well as by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) because the project includes a building that is on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation – the Tastee Diner cab.

Review of issues from October 2023 DAP meeting:

The DAP identified several issues with the overall building massing at the October 2023 meeting. These addressed overall massing, façade design, materials and building context. Below are the main points from the October 2023 meeting:

- The DAP wanted to understand further the base-middle-top relationship and particularly how the “top” would be shaped, taking into account views of the building and the skyline;
- The DAP was not satisfied with the design of the façade for the garage base that is above the Diner on the Cameron Street side. The horizontal elements shown at Sketch Plan seemed out of context and detracted from and overpowered the small, horizontal Diner element.
- DAP members wanted to see more emphasis on the corner of the building at Georgia Avenue and Cameron Street. Something unique should happen here with the façade to draw attention and activity to the prominent corner.

- The Panel was also concerned about lighting from the garage impacting the townhome community across Ramsey Avenue.
- The DAP was also looking forward to a better understanding of materials in the Site Plan submission.

The DAP also requested the following exhibits with resubmission. All have been submitted for October 2024 review but staff has indicated below where information is incomplete

- View of overall massing of the building, including the design of the tower and the top so the impact on the skyline can be assessed;
- Views that demonstrate the design of all sides of the building. This includes clear views of all sides of the base so the relationship to the context and to the diner car is clear from all angles;
- Full elevations of all sides of the whole building that show overall material palette and how those materials are working together; (*Elevations submitted but need more information on materials*)
- Views from down Georgia Avenue from several blocks away to understand the impact on the context;
- A view from the courthouse towards the diner and tower.
- Design of the corner at Georgia Avenue and Cameron Street in response to the DAP’s comment about how this corner should be prominent, along with views that show how it relates to the diner car location and design; (*view was submitted, but concerns remain about the design*)
- Plan, elevation and sections that describe how the change in grade from the sidewalk to the public space is being addressed, and
- A ground floor plan that addresses possible back-of-house space for Tastee Diner tenant and how that impacts the façade.

Notes on the Site Plan Submission:

With this submission, the applicant has including most of the exhibits requested. While there are rendered elevations, there are no exhibits that identify all of the façade materials. We have requested that exhibit and will forward to the DAP when we have it.

The top of the building has been shaped, and there are several levels and rooftop design elements that have been introduced. However, these elements are only visible from certain views and not from others. From the north looking down Georgia Avenue, it is hard to see any articulation of the top of the building. Per the Design Guidelines, high-rise buildings should pay particular attention to the shaping of the top and should have a cap – a “unique feature that adds a distinct character to the skyline (p.56).”

Although there is more articulation rendered in the building elevations, the façade elements that the DAP was concerned about appear to have not changed much. The garage façade that faces Cameron Street continues to be horizontal in nature, and of a different material palette (one that appears to be

much darker than in earlier renderings of the building) than the rest of the base. This makes the garage visible, rather than invisible per the Design Guidelines (p. 62). The treatment of the southern portion of the garage along Ramsey is more sympathetic to the diner structure and overall design of the building than the treatment of the garage facing Cameron Street.

The corner at Georgia Avenue and Cameron Street does not appear to have much additional interest or possibility of activity and the façade pattern is consistent from the ground floor all the way to the top at this location. This is a prominent corner of the project, but the location of the back side of an elevator shaft and a structural column precludes any potential retail entrances or visual interest at the pedestrian level. There is only one egress door from the fire stair opening onto Georgia Avenue from this frontage along a primary street that is classified in the SSDAC Plan and Design Guidelines as a Downtown Boulevard.

In addition, it is unclear what type of treatments or articulation are proposed along the south party wall to soften the base of the building as it abuts the existing adjacent restaurant and patio.