



Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: Lot #25

DATE: September 25, 2024

Attendance:

Panel

Robert Sponseller

Rod Henderer

Yulia Beltikova

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

Henry Coppola, Parks Planner

Applicant Team

Matt Gordon

Ryan Kim

Jeremy Sharp

Jonathan Johnson

Isaac Pretter

Steve Sattler

Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the first site plan presentation to the DAP. The review will focus on final architectural and articulation and voting of points for design excellence.

Panel:

General

- How many units? and how many MPDUs?
 - *Applicant Response: 235 units with 20% MPDUs, it totals 47 total MPDUs with 11 of them being deeply affordable.*
- Is this a wood construction?
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, it will be wood frame, five wood floors over three concrete floors. The top floors are a bearing wall, we will change the direction of the trusses, there is no steel necessary on the upper floors.*
 - The datum for the concrete is here at the top of the third floor. There are five floors of wood construction above. You've done a very good job hiding that line.
- Will the balconies be steel or wood?
 - *Applicant Response: Aluminum prefab, and they are connecting to the LDL. Wood balconies are problematic. Steel may come in to help attach.*
- Is this building energy efficient?
 - *Applicant Response: NGBS Gold, an equivalent of LEED.*
 - Yes, that is a high level.
- Are you programming anything for dogs, particularly pet waste stations?
 - *Applicant Response: We have yet to confirm Park elements, but our concern is more about urination when it comes to landscaping.*
 - *We can look into that.*
- The design overall is more refined and subdued, the corner with the main entry is more highlighted with projecting balconies.

Highland Avenue

- Are the louvers for exhaust or intake? Exhaust would kill the thin line of plants at this elevation.
 - *Applicant Response: They are for intake.*
- So down at the street, is that glazing?
 - *Applicant Response: There is an opportunity to have glazing into the garage.*
 - Would we prefer a window into the garage or a nice green panel?
 - I would prefer the green, it is more humane.
 - *The glazing would be frosted and allow some natural light into the garage.*
 - It is a challenging frontage, and we get it, but if it's a blank wall, there's a number of things that can be done. There is a beautiful example at the Giant in Bethesda where the vines are growing very nicely, and it will be more affordable and given the southern orientation, it's a great opportunity.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, we think a mix along the façade could help, we could leave glazing where we have the vault situation and give some light and wayfinding cues.*
- Would we rather have a window or a beautiful green panel? I would rather go green.
 - *Applicant Response: We could do a mixture of both.*

- At what height are the balconies?
 - Applicant Response: Starts at 5 feet but then drops off.
- Are those parking spaces on Highland Avenue reserved??
 - Applicant Response: *We haven't gotten that far with MCDOT. I would prefer dedicated drop off/pick up area, but we need to work through that still.*
- If you can further move the bike room to the Highland Avenue frontages, but anything you can do to make the bike room more prominent will help activate the space. You could even put windows into it and make it a feature.
 - Applicant Response: *We've never seen a bike room with glass that looks nice. I feel like it's an ugly space.*
 - Amsterdam has some beautiful examples. It's an opportunity to make it nice, colorful. Animate the room, its what you got.
 - *We get it, there are a couple more constraints coming our way, these are great comments. We just need to go bay by bay and see what will work best for screening.*
- Staff: could you please show the understory plantings on the site plan so it can be done later on? The 18-inch rule for ground cover is true but if we have them on the plans it will be easier to achieve later on.
 - Applicant Response: *Yes, the rule is probably more intended for tree panels so maybe we can try some larger plantings against the building.*

Elevations

- Can you explain what has changed since Sketch Plan in terms of activating the ground space on Maple and Highland Avenue?
 - Applicant Response: *We moved the bike room from Maple Avenue to Highland Avenue with an access to the street and lobby. On Maple Avenue we couldn't relocate the fire access room or generator room, it is tough on this side. The floor to floor is about 8-9 feet and so it is not a typical tall, 20 foot blank ground space.*
- Will the utilities be undergrounded?
 - Applicant Response: *Yes, they will be buried on Highland Avenue and on Maple Avenue they are located on the northern side.*
- Is the spandrel wood or metal? Will it fade over time?
 - Applicant Response: *We haven't decided, thinking about a fiber cement product with a wood appearance that has a true stain and grain. There are some good examples that have weathered well.*
- Do you have a sample of the shingling? It is interesting.
 - Applicant Response: *Yes, we brought them with us.*
- Will the shingling look like an addition or a unified building? I fear it fragments the building. I like the materials separately I just wonder if they go well together. Are you trying to highlight the fragmentation or unifying it? I support the moves of the massing, I just question the materials. If not the shingle, what would it be? I think it makes it look

as though one part would have been originally built and then the larger part of the building was constructed later.

- *Applicant Response: We are looking for the shingle for the townhome piece, but we were also thinking the stone. So, it will be slate shingling for the townhomes, and the metal shingling on the upper. I think the detailing of the masonry will be contemporary.*
- Well, I don't mean historic but that the main building was there originally and then the new building was added to it.
- *We weren't trying to make a story of time but a story of separate buildings.*
- To your credit, I think the massing is better than the previous submission and all the moves, I just question the materials.
- The palette is more refined and edited, the design is more cohesive and I think it works with the proposed five over three structure. It will be interesting to see how the design of the shingles play out, as there are less materials than before, shingles can be busy.
- I personally appreciate the contrast, particularly at the pedestrian scale. I like the cleaner articulation, much better than the previous submission.
- Why the hyphen, at the loading entrance?
 - *Applicant Response: Its where the loading is to connect it and give it scale.*
 - This is a minor massing thing, but if you could remove the dimple, it seems excessive?
 - *We were trying to respond to the community about the loading dock.*
 - I see, but this seems to accentuate it. I think you should consider removing it.
- Do you think the bays at the park are moving too much? They have three in the middle and then goes down and then down again.
- I think it helps actually, otherwise it would pancake it a bit.
- Do you need that thick spandrel condition that separates the glass from the floor above? If that spandrel is diminished it may highlight the entrance more.
 - *Applicant Response: This is a bit structural given the 20' height, and we've integrated that spandrel around the entire building.*
- Did you bring a brick sample as well? My eye picks up more of a golden hue.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, this is the same product, and the idea is you'd use it as an accent, it's a full depth brick. We've talked a lot about texture, whether its just texture or texture and depth.*
- The comparison from sketch to now has definitely been improved but one thing that I notice is that the earlier version had a much more prominent entrance, and the new one loses that a bit.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, we thought adding the canopy would help but we see in this rendering the trees are blocking it. We thought making this corner its own mass would help, and we had set this wall back a little.*
 - Is the entrance canopy metal?
 - Yes.
- I honestly still think there are too many materials, but I am in the minority.

- I think the ground plane needs more work but not sure if it warrants another meeting.
- Staff: if given enough criteria, we can review the ground plane landscaping at the staff level during the Site Plan application review.
- I think the real issue is the maintenance and how that is going to be coordinated with BUP and DOT and Parks.
 - *Staff: So, there are two different things here, with the public right-of-way that will be maintained by BUP and the Eastern Greenway will be maintained by Parks.*
 - Is there any issue with the Applicant's timeline to come back?
 - *Staff: There is substantial room in the timeline to return, but we can also review at Staff level.*
- To the Team's credit, they are providing the Eastern Greenway public park, but I believe there are too many materials do not unify or complement the project to support 20 points for design excellence.

Panel Recommendations:

The Panel voted 3 in support of 20 design excellence points (one voted to abstain with concern of too many materials as detailed above) with the following to be reviewed by Staff during Site Plan application:

1. Revised landscaping and screening along Highland Avenue and Maple Avenue to integrate green paneling, vines, and understory plantings.