



DATE: January 8, 2025
TO: Silver Spring Design Advisory Panel (DAP)
FROM: Atara Margolies, Planner III, Downcounty Planning
RE: Staff comments for the January 15, 2025 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 fourth 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. The applicant presented this project to the HPC on November 13, 2024, and a letter from the HPC regarding the project is included in these transmitted materials to the DAP for reference. The HPC’s responsibility is to comment on the siting and treatment of the historic Tastee Diner car. Any comments provided by HPC regarding the design of the new building are suggestions. The DAP holds the responsibility to comment on the new architecture and overall site design and determine whether the project achieves the required ten points for exceptional design.

Review of issues from October 2024 DAP meeting:

The DAP continued to express concerns about several issues:

- The DAP had some concerns about the overall massing of the building and how the applicant could reinforce the tower / base relationship from the Georgia Avenue view.
- The DAP was concerned with the design of the garage façade facing Cameron Street above the diner, even as there is appreciation for the façade design for other portions of the garage. The Design Guidelines express a desire for above-ground garages to “disappear” into a building.

This portion of the garage is emphasized, with a very dark material palette that includes a metal mesh. Likewise, the expressed horizontal panels and openings appears to overpower the horizontal character of the diner car below. The DAP has repeatedly requested that the vertical elements on this portion of the façade be emphasized to tie it to the rest of the building, to create a contrast to the horizontal diner car, and that additional materials be considered to balance the palette.

- The DAP was also still dissatisfied with the façade of the building facing Georgia Avenue both from the ground level and as one approaches the building. The DAP reiterated that this is the main north-south road in Silver Spring and that many people will only view the building from Georgia Avenue. Something unique should happen here with the façade to help activate the main street and to draw attention to the prominent corner.
- While the DAP liked the revised landscape design, they wanted the applicant to further explore how the three outdoor spaces could be connected on the Cameron Street side of the building.
- The DAP requested that the team submit or bring more information about materials.

The DAP also requested the following exhibits with resubmission, and all of these have been submitted with the January 2025 package, or the applicant will bring them to the January SSDAP meeting.

- Detailed plan(s) with spot elevations and dimensions of the ground floor of the building, specifically focusing on the Georgia Avenue and Cameron Street frontages and the open space at the Tastee Diner.
- 3D views of the open space at the Diner cab from several perspectives so that the DAP can understand the experience in this space and relationships of different program elements.
- Renderings that more clearly represent the design direction of the scheme with regard to materials and colors.
- Material samples, or high-quality images of materials and the overall palettes under consideration.

Notes on the Site Plan Submission:

With this submission, the applicant has including most of the exhibits requested. They have notably revised the renderings to represent the actual materials proposed, thus resulting in lighter and more realistic depictions of the project. Exhibits have also been provided to indicate proposed materials and the applicant has noted that they will bring physical material samples to the January SSDAP meeting.

The submission package notes that the applicant “has refined and simplified the material palette on the tower grid pattern, unifying the tower mass and distinguishing it as the primary element.” Upon comparison of the materials from October 2024 to January 2025 this is not immediately obvious, so this should be explored at the January DAP meeting.

Regarding the garage façade that is immediately behind the Tastee Diner car, the applicant team removed the mesh that was proposed for the open areas of that façade and provided vertical metal elements. The applicant asserts that with these changes, the patterning and design of the opening on the garage façade immediately behind the Historic Tastee Diner car directly relate to the “windows” on the Ramsey Avenue façade. The renderings still look remarkably similar, and the dark nature of this façade emphasizes this portion of the building when compared to the rest of the garage façade. The Design Guidelines recommend garage facades that are well-integrated into the overall façade approach to the building.

The applicant did make some adjustments to the landscape design along Cameron Street. There is now a connection directly from the sidewalk to the Tastee Diner outdoor seating area, and additional seating from what was presented previously. A ground-level rendering of this area is provided as requested on p.24 of the submission package.

There was also some discussion at the October 2024 meeting about how to increase street trees along Cameron Street and where the bump-outs along the on-street parking should be located. Some thought the bump-out in front of the residential entry could be removed to add an additional parking space. The new drawings show a tree planted in both of these locations. The applicant’s submission narrative includes a long explanation for why the elevators must remain on the Georgia Avenue frontage, largely due to tenant requirements, and presents a concept that will enhance the façade at this corner via an artistic treatment at the ground floor and a larger canopy and signage. This approach is still not in alignment with the Design Guidelines’ desire for ground-floor transparency and active storefront along major streets like Georgia Avenue.

Overall, while some small adjustments have been made to the design, there are several comments provided by the DAP that remain unaddressed, and several major issues are not yet resolved.