

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: 7025 Strathmore Street

**DATE:** May 28, 2025

#### Attendance:

<u>Panel</u> Robert Sponseller David Lieb Yulia Beltikova Sandeep Walia Paul Mortensen, ex officio member, Senior Urban Designer in the Director's Office

<u>Staff</u>

Atul Sharma, Assistant to the Deputy Director Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning Adam Bossi, Planner III Grace Bogdan, Planner IV Darcy Buckley, Parks Planner

<u>Applicant Team</u> Chris Ruhlen, Attorney Faik Tugberk, Architect Chong Cho, Architect Ian Duke, Engineer Andrew Kossow, Owner Rob Tilson, Landscape Architect

## **Discussion Points:**

Staff: This is the second site plan presentation to the DAP. The review will focus on response to first round comments including architectural materials, landscaping, and micro-biorention design. There are no members of the public present at the meeting.

## Panel:

## General

- I think these are great improvements and will give more breathing room at the corner.
- The complexity of this project has led the discussion to many questions. At the last meeting, the main question was could the design be achieved when considering the amount of detail required of the types of materials. This submission has proven that it can.

# Material Options/Elevations

- I noticed on the tower the original had more detail in the mullions that gets lost in the updated materials. There also seems to be some programmatic changes on the roof with the trellis. These are not true street elevations these are more birds eye so the trellis might not actually be seen from the street.
  - The penthouse element shown in the perspective renderings are not a penthouse but the building behind on Wisconsin Avenue. The renderings will be adjusted to remove the buildings behind.
- In terms of options for materials, I'm surprised to see EIFS, this is a lesser quality material compared to cementitious panels. Nichiha is higher density and looks more quality. I am curious about this new option you mentioned
  - Applicant Response: The sample looks very different than the typical smooth EIFS, having used it previously it has changed my views on the material, it's a decent material to use in the long term because it comes with insulation and more finish types.
  - From what I understand they are both with insulation and energy efficient.
    Builders seem to prefer Nichiha from all around and I don't see EIFS in any downtown Bethesda buildings.
  - Part of the reason we proposed EIFS is because material prices are moving around, and we want the project to pencil in case the price increases greatly. Our preferred choice is cementitious panels.
  - Yes, this is the fine texture. Can you commit to that finish in EIFS?
    Yes.
- I like the texture, equitone is cementitious and higher density and costly, this finish on EIFS is very similar and I like what you were going for, I'm just concerned it won't deliver.
- I also appreciate the changes to the canopy, the proportions work much better. I appreciate where the joints are going.

- The material affects the design, I really like the detail and corners and joints, I think the Nichiha provides more detail.
  - Applicant Response: You can get a premade corner in Nichiha. When you go to a rain screen application you can come up with a very thin open joint and that's what it would be. If you do it mechanically you remove the open joint.
- If you were to use EIFS would you still do white? Even the balconies? What are the vertical elements?
  - Applicant Response: Yes, we will use an open U channel, and it would be EIFS within the channel. There is a real railing system behind it. The vertical elements may be standard steel.
- Which material option would be better for that particular option? These are the things that I consider when thinking through the options.
  - Applicant Response: EIFS would be easier.
- One comment on the material, the windows on that building look almost flush and I perceived on this building that the windows would be recessed.
  - Applicant Response: We can vary that, this building varied having windows between 2-4 inches deep from the surface. It will be a 4-inch depth. EIFS is very easy to vary.
- On the first couple floors it goes from stone to brick to panel, it seems a little discordant. I'm curious what others think about that. In my mind it seems unhelpful with the brick texture. For me, the grain panels are still discordant, I mentioned that last time. They are neither contrasting nor complimentary. In my experience in Bethesda, these elements are becoming overwhelming without it actually fitting, so my general view is keeping things simple is better.
  - Applicant Response: I appreciate the comment, and I agree we will remove that material change at the penthouse level.
  - I remember we had this conversation at the February meeting, the reasoning is because you can't take EIFS to the ground, granite is at the base because of bioretention planters. I think the color is a good point, you want the color to look good and sharp. Since you already have the two types, the upper panel system will still stay cementitious panels? What is the inside of the balcony? Is it glass behind the balconies?
  - Applicant Response: Its grain, its secondary.
- I think the canopy is a strong element of the building, but it doesn't seem to show how it integrates into the building. If you were to extend that curve onto the ground, I think that would make it very interesting.
  - Applicant Response: I am more interested in the materials relating on the ground.
- When the building goes back to rectilinear, I assume there is some sort of resolve, but it also seems inconsistent. The upper-level swoop seems like another break in form and a detail that adds complexity without need.

- Applicant Response: I thought it was a point counter point element between the rectilinear and curved elements.
- You really don't see it, depending on the view.

# Bioretention Design and Through Block Connection

- Can you speak to the bioretention design? In my experience, some planters when they are not intentionally designed do not look good, so I was hoping that there is some relationship to the inside of the building
  - Applicant Response: This is highly regulated by another agency, and the requirement for the fencing is dictated by MCDOT. We will see what kind of treatment we can do with the precast to give it a bit more quality.
- The low wall and low fence on the wall at the bioretention areas looks nice and does not overpower the pedestrian experience. It is more about the landscape than the fencing. We would strongly prefer a low wall and low fence than a taller fence on the wall.
- What about the edge condition where you are showing the seating? Who is using that?
  - Applicant Response: The darker grey is to accentuate that there's a through block connection, the lighter grey is a passive area for the residents and use by the public. We are looking into artful seating areas, it's a premanufactured seating that can be lit.
- What is the programming for the building in this area?
  - Applicant Response: There is a bikeroom and a pet spa.
  - This space can really be a benefit to the users of the building and the outdoor area but it needs to be integrated a bit better and relatable to the area. Are these a raised planter?
  - We are not sure yet.
  - This area is in desperate need of outdoor areas so I see people definitely using this as a place to sit. If you could increase the landscape a little bit that would be helpful and feel protected and without it feels a little too wide.

# **Panel Recommendations:**

The Panel voted in support of 20 design excellence points for the Project's design with the following comment to be addressed by the Applicant during Site Plan review and confirmed by staff:

1. Modification of the landscaping within the through block connection to increase plantings that are more integrated with the interior area.

- 2. Confirm proposed material, height and design for railings around the stormwater planters.
- 3. Modification to the hardscape around the round corner to better align the paving with the corner element design.