




DATE: July 16, 2025

TO: Bethesda Downton Plan Design Advisory Panel (DAP)

FROM: Grace Bogdan, Planner IV, Design, Placemaking, & Policy Division   
Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor, West County Planning  
Sandra Pereira, Supervisor, Design, Placemaking, & Policy Division  
Paul Mortensen, Planning Innovation Lead, Director's Office

RE: Staff comments for the July 23, 2025 DAP Meeting

This will be a hybrid meeting, attendees can participate in person or virtually.

### Item #1

#### Montgomery Pearl

Benjamin Yonce, Architect, BKV Group

John Neilson, Landscape Architect, BKV Group

- 1<sup>st</sup> Sketch Plan presentation to the DAP, focusing on high-level conformance of building massing and urban design.
- The Applicant has met with staff several times over the last two years with various iterations of the design.
- The Site spans several properties located on the south side of Montgomery Avenue east and west of Pearl Street, which backs up to the Capital Crescent Trail and Purple Line, with residential detached homes (Town of Chevy Chase) to the south of the Purple Line.
- The proposal includes up to 700,000 square feet of density for a mixed-use development including multifamily, retail, and a health club facility spread over three buildings (West, Central, and East Building). The West building is anticipated to be approximately 5 stories in height with ground floor retail and residential above. The Central building will be 145 feet in height with ground floor retail and health club on the first two floors, and residential above. The East building will be 125 feet in height and only residential. The tallest portions of the Central and East buildings are focused on Montgomery Avenue, and step down to 45 feet towards the Purple Line (due to residential compatibility requirements of the Zoning Ordinance). Sheets 18-23 provide sections throughout the Site with varying heights and stepdowns.
- Montgomery Avenue is listed as a Downtown Mixed Use Street with a recommended build to line of 15-20 feet (provided 15-16 feet), base height of 3-6 stories (provided 4 stories) and a stepback of 10-15 feet (provided 10 feet).
- Pearl Street is designated as a shared street, and the Applicant has worked closely with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) and transportation planning staff to determine street width and zones based on the Complete Streets Design Guide and the necessary turn around at the termination of Pearl Street and the Purple Line.

- For shared streets, the Design Guidelines recommend a 15-20 foot setback above the base, the design proposes a 10 foot stepback above the base and requesting alternative compliance by reducing bulk in other ways such as varying height decreases towards the Purple Line, and proposing a reduced height across Pearl Street (53 feet max). The design of the buildings fronting on the shared street should be human scaled, well-articulated, and activated.
- The separated bicycle lanes along Montgomery Avenue are also master planned, and the Applicant has worked with MCDOT for proper design including a 10-foot bicycle lane and 15-foot sidewalk. The proposed eastern entrance to the parking garage on Montgomery Avenue still needs to be confirmed by Planning Staff and MCDOT.
- Previous meetings with the Applicant focused on the open space throughout the southern portions of the site and the relationship to the Shared Street and Capital Crescent Trail to ensure it will be meaningful space that feels public and will be properly activated. The architecture of the rear of the buildings should also be integrated with the design of the trail through glazing and access points. In future submissions, it would be helpful to have the CCT design included on the plans, and renderings with perspectives from the CCT and public spaces to demonstrate how the design has been integrated and activated.
- The driveway separating the Central and East Building is proposed as a through block connection. More information in future submissions would be helpful, including width and proposed treatments of the ground floor to help draw pedestrians into this space.
- The Applicant is requesting 25 points for exceptional design.

**Design Excellence Guide:**

- *10 Points: Generally consistent with the Design Guidelines and meets four of the CR Guideline Criteria*
- *20 Points: Superlative design that in a uniquely compelling way meets the Design Guidelines or overcomes a significant site or similar constraint; a top example of design within Montgomery County*
- *30 Points: Singular design that exemplifies the highest intent of the Design Guidelines and may be considered a top example of design within the Mid-Atlantic region*