

Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

PROJECT: 4861 Battery Lane

DATE: April 22, 2026

Attendance:

Panel

David Lieb

John Tschiderer

Robert Sponseller

Paul Mortensen, Ex-officio

Staff

Atul Sharma, Chief, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division

Sandra Pereira, Urban Design Supervisor, Design, Placemaking, and Policy (DPP) Division

Grace Bogdan, Planner IV, DPP

Adam Bossi, Planner III, West County Planning

Meghan Flynn, Planner II, West County Planning

Natasha Fahim, Planner III, DPP

Darcy Buckley, Parks Planner

Applicant Team

Chris Ruhlen – Attorney, Lerch Early

Faik Tugberk – Architect, Architects Collaborative

Chong Cho – Architect, Architects Collaborative

Andrew Kossow – Kossow Management

Michael Miller – Gelman

Josh Sloan – Vika

Ian Duke – Engineer, Vika

Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the first site plan presentation to the DAP. The review will focus on response to first round comments including refinement of the base and the through block connection. There are no members of the public present at the meeting.

Panel:



Battery Lane frontage

- In terms of the access, you see some of these recessed entrances on buildings and they are almost never successful because they appear dark and not as “public”. Can you point to some buildings in the area that are successful with an entrance recessed within a breezeway?
 - *Applicant Response: Can you tell me which ones are not successful?*
 - The building by the pancake house, there are several of them. I am pressing this because it seems like the building will be on the lighter side but often times a south light will be shining bright on this building and this area will appear quite dark due to the deep shadow. I’m also concerned the drop off will be unreadable to the building.
 - *The Sketch Plan commended the fact that this will consolidate three existing access points.*
 - I get it, I just wonder if there is something to be done at this point in the design to make it more readable. I find it highly unlikely the rideshare drivers are going to actually drive in there. It’s not intuitive.
 - Respectfully, I think that the fact that you haven’t continued the storefront makes it more readable, and the way it’s designed makes it more visible. I think the access is functional. I do think that the space needs to be higher.
 - My sense is the more open the better. What is the dimension of the first floor?
 - *20 feet in height.*
 - So that is not a lot, if you went up another 9 – 10 feet it would be more successful.
 - *That will not work as it affects the whole base design and we lose the base – middle – top. I agree the Pancake House example is unsuccessful but it’s a little different, it’s more like a tunnel. I’d like to put art on the ceiling and/or the wall to lighten it in the design phase.*
- Did you consider putting the drop off more into the courtyard, it kind of stops in the middle of the building. I’m also nervous about the overhang. Did you consider pulling the lobby further to the east?
 - *Applicant Response: If we do that it pushes the lobby and amenities into the courtyard.*
- I’ve been to the previous meetings and Staff has been working hard with all the architects in the surrounding buildings to make sure the drop off is internal to the site and not along Battery Lane.
- There was a long, continuous debate about this open plaza/canopy in the past, and to be fair, the conclusion was this is integral to their design. One thing that needs to be refined at site plan is what is the best way to make sure the canopy is inviting and lit, and not a cold, dark space.
 - *Applicant Response: When we had our community meeting, the response is actually polar opposite of this. They are excited that we are opening it up and providing the space.*
- One thing that could help to clarify the pedestrian and car space, if that could be refined with the landscaping treatment, it will read better than this front perspective.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, we can work on that.*

- The pedestrian entrance on Battery Lane is very understated. All the visual gravity is at the canopy.
 - *Applicant Response: Does it matter? You will be entering the building either way.*
 - I think in designing a building that looks nice it does matter. A building that will be used in an animating way does not look nice if you have an entrance that is an unused afterthought.
 - *It is the only vertical interruption to the horizontal access.*
 - I think increasing the landscaping under the overhang will help. Who is your landscape architect?
 - *Vika. Please keep in mind we will have some lighting and art in this space.*
 - (Staff) the landscape bed on the left needs to be refined so it doesn't look like an entrance by itself, the landscaping can be maneuvered in a way that looks welcoming. There are subtle ways to address the concerns.
- Should the pedestrian entrance be moved under the canopy? This to me is where the action is.
 - *Applicant Response There already is a second entrance under the canopy? Moving the front entrance will make both entrances too close to each other.*
 - I think this curve gives a lot of opportunity for art and lighting with the interesting shape.
- I think the building comfortably fits in the area. I would have loved to see another 10 stories on top. When you see the same heights along the street, it isn't interesting. Having different heights in a skyline is nice. It's an amenity rich building that I applaud. What is the sustainability level?
 - *Applicant Response: The developer agrees with your comment, and yes, we are going for LEED Silver.*

Through Block Connection

- NIH has a landscape architect on staff. It may be helpful to reach out to them in coordination of the east/west through block connection at the back of the site.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, it would be good to talk to them, but we are just bringing to staff's attention that this connection may not be the most successful.*
 - The east/west northern through block connection is an important element of the Bethesda Sector Plan.
- Is the parking garage stretching to the property lines on all sides? If the garage fills the site, it might be difficult to plant large species trees on site without deep root wells.
 - *Applicant Response: Yes, in some places but not all.*
- On the rear of the building, the trail that goes east/west is part of the Sector Plan that continues from Woodmont Avenue to the west. All the projects that have come through will provide connections through the rear. We've made comments in the past and we agree about the forest to the north, you show a line of trees, but I doubt you'll need all those given there already are trees. It could be more open. Hopefully the views will go deep and make the trail more open and much nicer. My one concern is the rear of the building stepping out over the through block connection area. It will block the long views along this trail. Will that affect the trees that you propose against the buildings?

Do you have an elevation of this or a view from further away on the trail to see this overhang impact?

- *Applicant Response: The bay is only 24 feet wide and no we don't have the elevations in this presentation.*
- (Staff) In the past reviews there were concerns about whether these connections would be adequate so it is important that this is considered as part of your review.
- I'm not particularly worried about the bay as I suspect more people will gravitate to the other paths in the area, and the forest is scrub.
- The soil volume is a concern given you will be planting the canopy trees along the western property line with the G1 and G2 structured parking below.
 - *Applicant Response: We also need a fence*
 - (staff) One of Sandeep's comments was whether the existing chain link fence would remain or if you would put up your own.

Elevations

- I would like to see all the elevations as part of this review. The south looks most concerning, is it a brick building or a glass building? It is a bit generic; I encourage you to give it more personality.
- I agree, I think we need to spend more time on these facades, and I would like to see something that is less generic.
 - *Applicant Response: We intentionally made the front more interesting and expensive to construct and intentionally made the remaining sides of the building more cost-effective with brick and glass.*
 - We just haven't seen them, and it is hard to discuss without that. Likewise, materials should be identified in the Site Plan drawings.
- Along the Battery Lane frontage there is an area for transformers and utilities and there should be some screening or plantings to shape this area.

Panel Recommendations:

The Panel determined the Project should return to the Design Advisory Panel with elevations for all facades delineating materials that are less generic than currently shown, and further information on the screening materials for the Battery Lane frontage.