

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** 7201 Wisconsin Avenue

**DATE:** March, 25, 2026

### **Attendance:**

#### Panel

David Lieb  
Sandeep Walia  
Yulia Beltikova  
Robert Sponseller

#### Staff

Elza Hisel McCoy, Chief, West County Planning Division  
Atul Sharma, Chief, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division  
Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor West County Planning  
Sandra Pereira, Urban Design Supervisor, Design, Placemaking, and Policy (DPP) Division  
Grace Bogdan, Planner IV, DPP  
Darcy Buckley, Parks Planner  
Meghan Flynn, Planner II, West County Planning  
Natasha Fahim, Planner III, DPP

#### Applicant Team

Pat Harris, Lerch Early  
Jack Kane, Pinkard Group  
Nick Scaldara, Pinkard Group  
Chris Huffer, SK&I  
Sami Kirkdil, SK&I  
Yavuz Goncu, SK&I  
Marius Radulescu, SK&I  
Ian Duke, VIKA

#### Discussion Points:

Staff: This is a conceptual level presentation to the DAP with an anticipated expedited review process. This review will focus on high level Sector Plan recommendations, general mass and bulk and conformance with the Design Guidelines.



Panel:

### General

- You will be working with the existing garage?
  - *Applicant Response: Yes, we will be working within the existing extents, which currently appears to go out to the existing property line, but we still need to conduct further surveying.*
  - Using the existing garage structure, the further you setback above, the load needs to carry below.
  - *We are getting the scans of where the walls are this week and we will be able to confirm, but yes, we understand the structural limitations. If we can express the base in a deeper manner and take advantage of the space, I can see how that could address some of the concerns.*
  - We understand the structural limitations but we are also in difficult times and I'm not sure how much this all affects your pro forma, but in pure design to me, the building wants to setback more on Willow Lane for the lower volume.
  - *Can we achieve that in materiality changes? That was the hope but its hard to show that in this type of modeling.*
- Is that the existing garage entrance location on Willow Avenue?
  - *Applicant Response: Yes it is, and based on the recent DRC comments we are looking at moving the loading entrance to the alley but will need to modify some of the dimensions.*
- Are all these buildings in the vicinity existing?
  - *Applicant Response: Some of these are, but this one in the foreground has Sketch Plan approval.*
  - It would be helpful if you could include the massings of all recently constructed and approved redevelopment, especially the site that is caddy corner to this, and then ghost the massings that are approved but unbuilt, for context.
  - (staff) It would be great to take these comments and look at the proposed and approved buildings and see how this can relate and help shape that outdoor room for the Farm Womens Market.

### Massing

- The general gist of pushing the density to the north and off the street is the right move. The back of the massing towards Elm Street Urban Park seems more successful than the front. I would suggest pushing the volume all the way to the north. To the south, limiting the height and the lower volume should be on the corner, it should be the defining element rather than the tall corner. Everything is a little too flat along the street for setbacks. The floating of the southern corner feels off.
  - *Applicant Response: Is that just to reduce the bulk mass at the corner?*
  - There seems to be too many volumes, there isn't a strong hierarchy and it isn't doing enough to reduce the mass. The main volume and southwest volume are too similar, if you could push the central mass inward a little more. The

southwest volume is a little too much for the corner. If you could get a little more distinction between the corner and the middle volume that would help.

- I agree. It is not clear to me the distinct base, middle, and top. On sheet A-15 I can somewhat see a base. The precedents are showing three story volumes but I do not see that yet in the massing. I agree you need a bit of a step-back from Willow Lane.
  - *Applicant Response: At the east end where it goes up about 17 stories, its about 9 feet setback.*
  - So mathematically it sounds right but when I look at the volume it doesn't feel enough, it could be the rendering and the materials are all monotone currently.
- I strongly agree with the staff memo and other panel member comments. There is insufficient variation in the façade, the moves are too subtle to read. On Sheet A-18, I hope there will not be a great deal of material variation and there will be a consistent façade treatment. I would not want to see the middle tower become a glass eruption which is common, and leads to an incohesive building. The volume to the south looks very heavy which I understand is a bit because of the shading. There is an asymmetry to the building which I think can be great if sufficient, if it is too subtle it just gets lost. The bowing of the central volume seems a bit jarring. The base variation of height does not feel strong and more consistency and less variation would be helpful in that regard.
- What is the lower massing to the north?
  - *Applicant Response: This is the required tower setback of 22-25'*
  - Can it be reduced? It seems unlikely that the northern bank site will redevelop.
  - (staff) Tower step-backs can be reduced if there is a larger goal at play and the design better meets the intent of the Design Guidelines. It seems that is the case here.

#### *Open Space/Public Realm*

- Is the at-grade amenity at the rear for the public?
  - *Applicant Response: No, that will be a private amenity and also utilized for stormwater management. There would likely be a private screen. But now that we are moving the loading to the rear this will shift and we haven't figured it out yet.*
  - I wonder if there is an opportunity here with the alley to make the alley semi-private, not entirely gated off but the design indicates that it is private, that could be nice here.
- The open space in front of Starbucks to the west is staying correct?
  - *Applicant Response: Yes*
  - As I look at the existing conditions, we've missed that there is an existing major corner treatment and the proposal takes that away. This currently relates strongly to the open space across the street to the west and south. Along with the dedicated bike lanes, there is a strong connection currently. I really appreciate the other comments regarding a semi-private garden at the rear. If the corner public space will be removed, how can we compensate? Is there an aspect of connectivity from the corner to the rear alley? How does the fabric remain? Could raised planters be of use here to frame that space?
  - *Applicant Response: One thing to mention regarding the alley is that the property owners that use that alley currently use it for heavy operations and the space is*

*pretty grim, which we can't control. But we are committed to moving the loading to the alley.*

**Panel Recommendations:**

The Panel determined the Project should return to the Design Advisory Panel before moving forward to address massing comments including treatment of the base/middle/top, the corner design, and relationship to the surrounding context.