




DATE: March 18, 2026

TO: Bethesda Downton Plan Design Advisory Panel (DAP)

FROM: Grace Bogdan, Planner IV, Design, Placemaking, & Policy Division 
Atul Sharma, Chief, Design, Placemaking, & Policy Division
Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Designer, Director's Office
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RE: Staff comments for the March 25, 2026 DAP Meeting

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

Item #1

7201 Wisconsin Avenue

Chris Huffer, Architect, SK+I

Pinkard Group, Developer

- 1st Concept plan presentation to the DAP, focusing on high-level conformance of building massing and urban design. The Project anticipates using an expedited application process, “Commercial to Residential Reconstruction Plan” (CRR Plan) which will combine the Sketch and Site Plan portion of the process.
- The Site is located on the east side of Wisconsin Avenue at the corner of Willow Lane, on the northern side across the street from the Farm Women’s Market. The Site also fronts on an alley that accesses off Willow Avenue to the east. To the north and east are two-three story buildings including a condominium building, and retail/office buildings, with Elm Street Urban Park further east.
- The Applicant proposes to construct a 262’ tall mixed-use building with ground floor retail and residential above, including 17.7% MPDUs.
- Wisconsin Avenue is designated an Urban Boulevard, with recommendations for a 25-30 foot build-to-line, a base height of 3-6 stories with a stepback of 10-15 feet above the base. The Applicant is proposing the recommended build-to-line and a base height of approximately 6 stories with a stepback of 2-6 feet. Willow Lane is designated as a Neighborhood Local Street, with recommendations for a 12-15 foot build-to-line, with a base height of 2-4 stories and a 15-20 foot stepback above the base. The Applicant is proposing a build-to-line of 22-25 feet, a base height of 3-5 stories and a stepback of 6-9 feet above the base.
- The Applicant is proposing a tower stepback on the northern side of the site, the Design Guidelines recommends 22.5-30 feet and the Applicant proposes to provide a stepback of 22-25 feet on the north side above a 5 story base. Staff recommends the height of base on northern end should be adjusted to be consistent with existing building and/or the southern corner.

- The massing concentrates the building height towards Wisconsin Avenue with the tower focused towards the middle of the Wisconsin Avenue frontage, with the height decreasing to the east to approximately 18 stories to transition towards the Elm Street Urban Park.
- Staff appreciates the breakdown of scale towards the east but believes a less rigid or more asymmetrical articulation of the balconies facing the Elm Street Urban Park to the east might be more in keeping with the breakdown of the massing.
- The proposal includes a large projecting set of balconies on the southwestern corner. While they create an interesting corner treatment, they compete with the primary mass of the tower and loom over the extremely small scale Farm Women's Market structure. This corner treatment should be reconsidered/simplified.
- Staff recommends that the base should be proud of the tower elements to better relate to the smaller-scaled historical Farm Women's Market to the south. While the massing diagrams show the intention of applying this strategy, the addition of several bays, balconies and grounding of the central tower erode the expression of the base. The top corner precedent photo provided on pages A-28 shows a successful base defining relationship very well. These precedents show a strong base with a tower set back above, while the proposed base and stepback only occurs for a couple floors and then the massing steps back out, creating deep shadows and a heavy weight towards the southern corner.
- The Applicant proposes vehicular and loading access off Willow Lane. However, Staff recommends moving this access to a slightly widened existing alley rather than adding more servicing bays and curb cuts along Willow Lane.
- The Applicant is requesting 20 design excellence points.