



DATE: April 17, 2026

TO: Bethesda Downton Plan Design Advisory Panel (DAP)

FROM: Grace Bogdan, Planner IV, Design, Placemaking, & Policy Division  
Sandra Pereira, Supervisor, Design, Placemaking, & Policy Division  
Atul Sharma, Chief, Design, Placemaking, & Policy Division  
Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Designer, Director's Office

RE: Staff comments for the April 22, 2026 DAP Meeting

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

## Item #1

### 4861(4887) Battery Lane

Architects Collaborative Inc  
Vika, Landscape Architect

- 1<sup>st</sup> Site Plan level presentation, focusing on building articulation, architectural elevations, landscaping, and comments from Sketch Plan review.
- The Project is located on the north side of Battery Lane directly east of 4901 Battery Lane, which has Site Plan approval, and directly west of 4857 Battery Lane, which has Sketch Plan approval. Both of these adjacent property's approvals remain valid, but unbuilt.
- The Applicant proposes to replace the existing U-shaped garden style apartment building with one 12-story residential building for up to 453 multifamily units with 15% MPDUs, a sector planned east/west through block connection at the rear, one access point off of Battery Lane providing access to drop-off/pick-up area, loading, and a parking garage all internal to the site.
- The project was presented to the Bethesda DAP in June and October of 2023, the full meeting minutes are attached to this memo. At the conclusion of the October 2023 meeting, the Panel requested the Applicant return at Site Plan with the following:
  1. Further refine building massing and base-level design to be responsive to the datum line along the street to the east and west.
  2. Provide eye level perspectives and a section from Battery Lane into the site showing how the architecture of the building meets the ground and refine the design under the canopy to include activating elements.
  3. Provide eye level perspectives of the through block connections showing the site's topography, proposed architecture, and landscaping, and refine the design of public and quasi-public outdoor spaces.
- As shown on Sheet A-16, the submission addresses the base as previously requested to better relate to the datum line intended with future approved development to the east and west by providing a two-story base with a 7-foot step-back and opening to a balcony area for residents above the base. The middle is articulated with a rigid grid that incorporates balconies along the

Battery Lane frontage, and the western corner features a setback tower that continues to top the building.

- The submission incorporates renderings (Sheets A-32 & 33) as requested showing the view from Battery Lane into the canopy area and courtyard. There was significant discussion at Sketch Plan regarding the canopy space and contributing to the urban context. Some Panel members thought the view into the interior provided depth, others felt it could erode the street wall and be a cold underpass for cars. The current submission shows the lobby entrance and amenity area adjacent to this space for activation as well as landscaping.
- Sheets A-37 & 38 provide updated perspectives of how the proposal relates to the north/south through block connection along 4901 Battery Lane and the landscaping along the proposed through block connection on site at the rear of the property. There are several plantings proposed including ornamental trees closer to the building in the rear and larger canopy trees towards the property lines. The building projects over this northern rear area beginning at the third floor, which along with the dense plantings, may make this space feel darker and smaller. The DAP previously suggested a more porous landscaping into the existing NIH property to the north, as it is already very densely planted. The Applicant should consider providing less plantings along the northern property line to make the through block connection feel larger and more open. The new plans also propose extending the parking garage below to the property lines on the north, east, and western edges, which may impact the size and quality of the proposed trees. The Sketch Plan conditioned the rear through block connection to be at least 29 feet in width and designed to easily accommodate physical and visual connection to the property to east when redevelopment occurs. The projection of floors to the north (at the northwest corner) starting at the third floor may constrict the open views at the pedestrian passage from the east and west.
- The perspectives of the building suggest a light brick material at the base, top, and rear of the building, however the Applicant should provide more detail on materials for the highly articulated mid-stories of the building and balconies.
- There is an open area proposed along the Battery Lane frontage to the west, next to the 4901 Battery Lane through block connection entrance, that will accommodate transformers and utilizes. This space should be amenitized with seating and landscaping to screen the utilities and enhance the gateway into the north/south through block connection on the adjacent property.
- The Applicant is requesting 20 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*



# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** 4861 Battery Lane

**DATE:** October 25, 2023

### **Attendance:**

#### Panel

Jonathan Fitch

Yulia Beltikova

Rod Henderer

Brian Kelly

Damon Orobona

Paul Mortensen, ex officio member, Senior Urban Designer in the Director's Office

#### Staff

Atul Sharma, Assistant to the Deputy Director

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Rachel Newhouse, Parks Planner

Henry Coppola, Parks Planner

Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner

#### Applicant Team

Chris Ruhlen – Attorney, Lerch Early

Faik Tugberk – Architect, Architects Collaborative

Jiayu Liu – Architect, Architects Collaborative

Josh Sloan – Engineer, Vika

Andrew Kossow - Owner

Michael Miller - Gelman

#### Discussion Points:

Staff: This is the second sketch plan presentation to the DAP. The review will focus on general mass and bulk and conformance with the Design Guidelines and revisions based on the first round of comments.

Panel:

#### *General Comments*

- In future resubmissions, it would be very helpful to have everything that is part of the review in one presentation. Moving back and forth between the separate presentations has been very difficult to follow and is impacting our understanding of the project procession.

#### *Through Block Connections*

- There was a view you shared today along the western through block connection that looks larger than what we saw in the supplemental package. It looks wider and has a public to private delineation. Is this what you are proposing?
  - *Applicant Response: The original view was taken higher up in the first submittal; it was a slightly raised view. The idea is to build on the proposed path from the western project site (4901 Battery Lane) and have a rhythm of small spaces around it, defined with plantings, seat walls, and furnishings to buffer the more private realm along our proposed building with terraces. There is about 3 feet of grade we are dealing with between the path and property line.*
  - I know you mention the grade difficulty of having entrances into ground floor units. But if you show a rendering like this that is flat and doesn't show the grade you are dealing with, it is not helpful. I need to see it so the rendering can indicate that it is dealing with the grade in a public and semiprivate way. The rendering shows its flat and makes one want it to all be public.
- On the north side of the building with the pathway, if the view into NIH is unlikely to change because it is an institution and is pleasant and open, it seems to me this planting ought to be against the building and the views into NIH should be opened up.
  - *Applicant Response: I agree, we can move around the plantings proposed in the area and clear the understory within our property line. This was just a conceptual rendering. We don't have any forest on our site but the intent is to provide a green vegetative wall on the left side and transition to NIH with an edge treatment so it is open and inviting.*

#### *Massing*

- The street view of Battery Lane in the supplemental, can we see this?
  - *Applicant Response: We did this very quickly to respond to the staff comments but we would not like to discuss it.*
  - Staff: So what was the intent of the supplemental?

- *Applicant Response: I wanted to show what happens if we eliminate the front cantilever and do a three-story base. It essentially eliminates the architectural concept of the base.*
- Staff: So this was just an exercise to show what would happen but not actually something you would like to pursue?
- Yes.
- I think the base in this presentation is much too high, your supplemental seems like an attempt to bring it down which I thought was a better move but it just needs refinement.
  - *Applicant Response: I appreciate that it just needs a lot of work and I am trying to hang on to this architectural concept with the proportions and meet the 60 foot requirements.*
  - Yes, but you have two neighbors that have created this datum.
  - *Applicant Response: Yes, but they may not be built.*
  - Staff: The site to the west has site plan entitlements but the building to the east is only at sketch plan.
- One of the merits here is the top of the building where you've devised a way for the building massing to meet the sky gracefully. How the building meets the ground on Battery Lane is important and it feels like someone has raised the belt on trousers. The adjacent buildings have created a datum that should be respected.
- At risk of repeating myself, I think the supplemental view is going in the right direction but needs a lot of refinement. I think you need to resolve the band between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> floor, how do you terminate that?
- In the previous reviews, we had the base that was low and then a recess for a floor with a 3 story "belt" above. It was not a clear base-middle-top. You had base 1, belt 1, then middle, then top. In this supplemental drawing, I think the 'belt' weaving into the base is helpful and a lot of detail has been put in.
  - *Applicant Response: Once I get rid of the belt concept then the cantilever disappears, they cannot exist in the same space, that is shown in the supplemental. Yes, the supplemental shakes hands with the buildings to the east and west but it loses what we are trying to do here. It just requires more time. What I would like to do is retain the 3 story so we can take the eye in and see if we can develop a base at the same height. I just did not like what was happening in the base with the supplemental, it was looking very ordinary.*
  - I think pulling the belt around onto Battery Lane and terminating it where the balconies reinforces what you are trying to do with the top and makes it more cohesive. The second floor at the top of the base, I agree.
  - *Applicant Response: Perhaps it needs to be all glass or all one material, its way too heavy.*

### Canopy

- The thing that gives me pause is the raising of the building on piloti on the southeast corner. I'm not sure what it gives back to the street. A good urban building creates a

street wall and that opening begins to erode the street wall. The renderings of the previous versions, the glazing seems to offer more transparency and what we are currently looking at is more opaque. This could end up being a dark, deep, and cold underpass from the street to the car drop off behind.

- *Applicant Response: This is just a rendering, we are trying to respond to massing issues. I appreciate your comments and I understand the urban edge. My point is that not every building has to do the same thing. Buildings in Woodmont Triangle all have varying elements with through block connections doing all different things. These are all freestanding buildings unlike downtown and what does it offer to the pedestrian? A view of a green plaza that may be semiprivate but it is also an attractive arrival point for a resident. My point with the supplemental was that, if it was very critical for a three-story base, this is what would happen.*
- *Applicant: We also would like a point of clarification that the previous minutes stated this is at site plan, but this is just sketch.*
- *Staff: Correct this is at Sketch Plan, that was a mistake.*
- Differing from my fellow Panel members, I actually like the view from Battery Lane into the courtyard so I'm not as troubled by that, it allows some sense of depth, and penetration into the building, and mystery. I agree with the improvements with the roof of the building and relieving the pressure on the north façade from NIH.
- The west façade and NIH façade I see there are additional balconies, and I think that is a positive move that I like a lot. There is a lot more detail here. I agree with the view into the courtyard, the space looks quite pleasant.
  - *Applicant Response: Thank you, I am looking at it as an opportunity to bring art to the space.*
  - *Staff: It will definitely need some activation or help because many months of the year it will be a dead zone with cold blowing breezes. Yes, there will be a view into the courtyard but the activity on the street will be lacking. Something like public art will be necessary. Also, the driveway off Battery will provide a wide view into the interior court area. Isn't that enough to let pedestrians see that something is behind?*
- The canopy and view into the site from Battery Lane, you've talked about how inviting that is, but I disagree. We don't have any imagery to convince me otherwise and I'm very skeptical.
- Agreed, a couple of eye level perspective of how the building meets the ground rendered so we can understand the architecture and that the greenery is transparent enough. That would be a tool we can use to improve the street edge.
- The open space that is deeper into the site, it is not meant for the public, so making that visible isn't the point. It might be more inviting to the public if the lobby and other lobby improvements that the public could be invited into were present along a majority of the street edge.
  - *Applicant Response: I respect the comment, but I disagree, it is a pleasant green space with a view that will provide relief on the street. I see a lot of opportunity*

*under the canopy to light up, the whole building at the first floor is glass and transparent, daytime or nighttime. I would also like to have the street connection in the plaza other than from the driveway. We do not intend on leaving that area vacant, maybe making the columns more art like or green.*

- I don't think I can offer a firm endorsement of this without seeing it.
- Staff: It would also be helpful to see how the drive through interacts with this space with this wide void into and beside the building. It may help the conversation.
- *Applicant Response: This seems like an awful amount of detail to be providing at sketch, is this right?*
- Staff: At sketch we are just taking straw vote, these can be items that are brought back at the site plan level, is that what the Panel is intending?
- Well I am nervous that if this is not addressed now it may be too late at site.
- Staff: At sketch we are discussing massing, this is a massing issue. If we do not have enough information then maybe these additional exhibits will help.
- *Applicant Response: I have found the view of that space based on our first submission. But this view has not been updated based on the resubmitted design.*
- What I'm hearing from my fellow panel members is that the space needs to be inviting and active but I feel this can wait until the next stage.
- There are differing opinions here today and it seems like it does need to get resolved, but my personal opinion is that I like this design and while I could go both ways, I think this could move forward.
- *Applicant Response: I am willing to resolve the base, but I would like to retain this view into the courtyard. I think some of this will resolve itself at the site plan stage as we will have more information to be able to answer them at that detailed level.*

### **Panel Recommendations:**

The Panel voted 3 -2 that the Application is on track to meet the minimum 10 design excellence points with the following to be addressed during the site plan review:

1. Further refine building massing and base-level design to be responsive to the datum line along the street to the east and west.
2. Provide eye level perspectives and a section from Battery Lane into the site showing how the architecture of the building meets the ground and refine the design under the canopy to include activating elements.
3. Provide eye level perspectives of the through block connections showing the site's topography, proposed architecture, and landscaping, and refine the design of public and quasi-public outdoor spaces.

# Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel

## Meeting Minutes

**PROJECT:** 4861 Battery Lane

**DATE:** June 28, 2023

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*The 4861 Battery Lane project was reviewed by the Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel on June 28, 2023. The following meeting notes summarize the Panel's discussion, recommendations regarding design excellence, and the exceptional design public benefits points. The project is in the Site Plan stage and the Design Advisory Panel will determine if comments from Sketch Plan have been incorporated and take the final vote for design excellence public benefit points if it is determined the Project is suitable. Should you have any additional questions and/or comments please feel free to contact the Design Advisory Panel Liaison.*

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### **Attendance:**

#### Panel

Jonathan Fitch

Yulia Beltikova

Rod Henderer

Paul Mortensen, ex officio member, Senior Urban Designer in the Director's Office

#### Staff

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Planning Director

Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, DownCounty Planning

Stephanie Dickel, Regulatory Supervisor DownCounty Planning

Grace Bogdan, Planner III

Henry Coppola, Parks Planner

Cristina Sasaki, Parks Planner

#### Applicant Team

Bob Harris – Attorney, Lerch Early

Faik Tugberk – Architect, Architects Collaborative

Jiayu – Architect, Architects Collaborative

Ian Duke – Engineer, Vika

Michael Miller, Gelman

#### Discussion Points:



Staff: This is the first sketch plan presentation to the DAP. The review will focus on general mass and bulk and conformance with the Design Guidelines.

Panel:

#### *General Comments*

- I appreciate the C shape of the building to allow for a larger green space and I understand why you've oriented it this way given the site's topography and loading.
- I also appreciate the reduction of curb cuts from 3 to 1 and the trail connections, the second trail connection is a little questionable as it crosses over the driveway but I like the landscaping and can see how it may benefit the residents.
  - *Applicant Response: Great point, we think the project will create bicycle traffic coming out of the lobby so it will likely be used mostly by tenants of the building. We hope to enhance the proposed trail edge to the west of our site.*
- Seems like the parking spaces are rather high at 1 space per unit, we've been seeing more like .75 spaces per unit in Bethesda.
  - *Applicant Response: We can look into that.*
  - Staff: 4901 Battery Lane to the west provided approximately .8 spaces per unit.
- Are you planning any renewable sources such as solar in your project?
  - *Applicant Response: None so far, we are going to be forced to use the ERF mechanical systems because there is very little roof space left after the green roof and amenity space.*

#### *Massing, Setbacks & Stepbacks*

- The massing that shows the first setback is actually less than 6 feet given the extra pull out. I understand that it is difficult to achieve the full stepback in residential buildings but all developments in Bethesda have been expected to meet these setback guidelines. I was wondering if the balconies are within that 4-6 foot setback or project over.
  - *Applicant Response: We will have some balconies but our intent is to show the balconies in the bold area so it is not overbearing and speaks to the street. I didn't contemplate more than the vertical balconies as shown because those are stitching the massing.*
- So the balconies do not project over the massing? OK I am glad to see that. Since the pandemic, people want more outdoor space and it is becoming more important in our design and development. Where are you in calculating the amount of outdoor space for the units you propose?
  - *Applicant Response: I am not sure percentage wise, but you are right we need more balconies, we went through a time where people saw balconies as a nuisance, and they shrunk in size, but they are coming back. On the west and east side, we intend to provide more balconies. We have developed unit types that provide multi-use areas that can be study areas or play areas for children, that was in response to the pandemic. We also intend to provide additional public space on the property*

- What is the dimension of the depth at the back of the building to the property line? It seems very narrow. This trail along the northern property line is a significant amenity for this greater neighborhood and should be celebrated as such.
  - *Applicant Response: The pinch point is 25 feet*
  - And then the elevation goes up 120 feet from there? The trail is very important to the Sector Plan and the mass of this building going straight up from there is really jarring.
  - *Applicant Response: I agree but the NIH campus is very green and large on the other side. And remember the Bethesda Trolley Trail that runs east west is a bicycle highway and the buildings that are further to the east and what seems to be forest and slope, I am not sure a path will ever be able to connect through.*
    - Staff: There has been a significant amount of time spent developing that trail to the west. We suggest looking at how that was designed and match that rather than looking to the east.
    - *Applicant Response: Understood.*
- You say the stepbacks on the front are difficult to accomplish, almost all projects in Bethesda say that and our previous Planning Board did not think that argument was sufficient. While we've had some projects that have not done the full stepback, they have provided reasonable explanations and designs that go beyond the Design Guidelines. I think aesthetically it is not meeting the Design Guidelines and you will need to have a very cohesive and strong argument beyond that it is difficult to build.
- We require a diagram showing the massing that would result from truly prescribing to the Design Guidelines and how the proposed massing differs. In addition to coming up with a verbal description that will be necessary, please provide that in the subsequent submission.
  - *Applicant Response: Understood, thank you.*
- The bigger issue for me is the western side, how long is it, are the units accessible? I understand there is a grade differential
  - *Applicant Response: The grade tapers as you go to the north side, the building drawings show patios with retaining walls that diminish and become ground level patio*
  - I think the issue when you get to the next stage is, what is the articulation of that façade? It is very long and has not been given focus so far.
  - Staff: The length of the western property line is approximately 380 feet.
- One thing I saw that was peculiar with the submission was the canopy design, but with the rendering shown I begin to understand it.

#### *Interior drop off/plaza area*

- I'm looking at the size of the circular drop off and it is rather large given the neighboring property's much smaller drop off footprint. Also having parallel parking seems completely unnecessary.
  - *Applicant Response: They aren't really parking spaces but more so delivery spaces. We've been working on these kind of buildings for quite some time.*

- I understand the need for delivery spaces, but in the turnaround I do not understand. So, you are saying it is a benefit to having them park here as opposed to on Battery Lane?
- *Applicant Response: Yes, we are getting them off the street and away from the bicycle lanes.*
- Can you make the loading and garage access area more cohesive with the drop off area? This layout looks like two distinct components rather than one design.
- Yes, the imbalance of pavement and non-pavement on the east side is the main issue.
- Is the breezeway/understory plaza an issue with anyone else? Rather than enclosed lobby facing the street it seems problematic over most of the year to be a tall, single story breezeway through the building.
- I find it intriguing the way it is opened up to Battery Lane, but the asphalt seems heavy and perhaps unnecessary. In general it could be lightened up with less asphalt or concrete, more porous materials.
- Also take a look at the soffit treatment, it may help lighten the area.
  - *Applicant Response: Those are details we will focus on during the site plan review.*
- Could you have spoken with the project to the west to share their driveway? Is it even possible? If you could have flipped the building this would have seriously benefited the designs on both sides, Battery Lane's urban design, and maybe resulted in more floor area potential. Both buildings would then share a single-entry drive/service alley rather than each building having their own entry drive like a suburban sub-division of every detached house having its own driveway.
  - *Applicant Response: Yes we have a good relationship but there are many logistical issues.*

**Panel Recommendations:**

The Panel requested the Applicant to return with further refinement of the massing and understory plaza and drop off area.