

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: October 30, 2008

Meeting No: 90

Project: Mechanic Theater Adaptive Reuse

Phase: Introduction

Location: SW Corner Charles and Baltimore Streets

PRESENTATION:

Following introductions by Gary Cole and Robert Quilter, Planning, outlining the guidelines and principles developed for the project, Kathleen Kotarba, CHAP, clarified the CHAP status for the Mechanic Theater. This was followed by an excellent power point presentation by the Architect for the project, Shalom Baranes. The presentation included a review of Architect, John Johansen's intentions for the design of the Mechanic Theater, examples of Johansen's other work during this period, and the investigation of three alternative urban design strategies to develop a residential/hotel tower, on this site, while preserving the major volume of the Mechanic.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel congratulated the Architect on his presentation and extends appreciation to the developer on his choice of Architect for this key Baltimore project. Comments from the Panel identify the following issues, concerns and recommendations:

1. The exit ramp from the garage on Charles Street and the elevator at Charles and Baltimore Street should be eliminated to provide an opportunity to exploit a Charles Street presence for the tower with appropriate sidewalk, streetscape and entry treatments.
2. Generally, the Panel considered the tower overly articulated and suggested that the approach of interpreting the Mechanic Theater's articulation in the tower, while a valid strategy, is not necessarily the only strategy. The façade seen from Hopkins Plaza might consider the symmetry of the Theater and provide a contrast or foil to the Mechanic's highly articulated form and could differ from the Charles Street façade. The Panel supported the volumetric treatment of the tower, to reduce the bulk, but suggested that the roof forms were too complex.

3. The Panel was unanimous in its concern of the treatment of the tower at the corner of Charles and Baltimore Streets. It would appear that if the ramp and elevator could be eliminated, the tower could come to grade and be developed as a more desirable corner feature.
4. The overhanging glazed elements that wrap around from Charles Street at the third level were extensively discussed. Not all Panel members considered this treatment appropriate.
5. Utilizing the Fly Loft as a dramatic interior circulation space is well conceived. However the five foot separation of the loft from the tower is minimal.
6. It would appear that to really utilize the terrace level for public use, access from Hopkins Plaza would need to be developed. The Panel suggests that this be investigated.
7. Concern was also expressed relative to the possible impact of construction to the subway entry adjoining the Mechanic Theater on Baltimore Street, by the Panel and by audience member Del. T. Adams of MDOT. Mr. Adams stated that they are willing to work with the development team to address the current subway entrance conditions and consider an improved relationship.

In summation, the Panel is most encouraged by the design direction identified in this proposal and the degree to which the Mechanic Theater is to be preserved. The Panel has every confidence in Architect, Shalom Baranes and that with the support of developer, Howard S. Brown a project of the highest quality will result. It trusts that the Panel's comments from this first meeting will assist in reaching this goal.

PANEL ACTION:

No formal action – Introduction Meeting.

Attending:

Shalom Baranes, Dan Stuver – SBA
Howard Brown, Skip Antonucci, Craig Rosenthal – DS Brown
Mel Greenwald, Ben Greenwald – Arrow Parking
Del T. Adams – MDOT
Molly Buckheit – GBC
Nan Rohrer, Mackenzie Paull – DPOB
Ed Gunts – The Sun

Ms. Eig; Messrs. Bowden, Ramberg, Schack, Britt and Cameron – Panel
Gary Cole, Kathleen Kotarba, Brigitte Fessenden, Alex Hoffman, Will Doane, Wolde Ararsa, Erv McDaniels, Lisa Morris, Rob Rumburg, Anthony Cataldo, Bob Quilter - Planning