

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

Date: August 12, 2010

Meeting No.: 114

Project: 25th Street Station Architecture

Phase: Continued Schematic

Location: Maryland / 25th / Howard / 24th Streets Vicinity

PRESENTATION:

Jon Laria, representing the developer, provided an update on the project, in particular the approval of the PUD by the Planning Commission. Donald Kann, of KANN Partners, began by explaining additions to the design team, including the architectural firm Marks Thomas Associates that will be designing the residential component of the project, and Brown Craig Turner, who will address the retail component. Mr. Kann then reviewed changes to the project, including changes to the Walmart building and the former GM Building at 25th Street and Howard. He also presented the northwest elevations of Site #1 and sections through Site #1 showing the Lowes. Following Mr. Kann was Addison Palmer and Amanda Owens of STV, who reviewed various site design issues, including the addition of a low wall along Howard Street, truck access to the Walmart, and the circulation through Site #2. Faith Nevins of Marks Thomas Architects presented revisions to the housing located on Maryland Avenue, changing from a rowhouse style to massing and elevations more like a mid-rise apartment building.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel was very positive about the changes made to the housing component of Site #1 and feels that the project is making good progress. However, members feel that there are still several issues that need to be addressed prior to the final design review in order to effectively address the goals established for the project, including:

Edges of the development. The Panel appreciated the inclusion of the low brick wall along Howard Street but agrees that it needs to be taller in order to block the headlights of the cars. Regarding the wall along 24th and Sisson Street; the Panel would like design team to reconsider the design of the wall. While members understand the desire of neighbors to screen the service area and block noise and fumes, the twelve foot high wall seems oppressive and a slightly lower wall (perhaps ten feet) should be considered. Also, the stucco wall in between the stone piers looked unappealing, and concern was raised by a couple of members as to how well the vines would cover the wall. It is recommended that a well-designed wall that has pedestrian-scaled features that minimize the vertical scale should be the goal, with climbing plants as an enhancement. It was also suggested that the wall be more stone than stucco, that brick might also be used to relate it to other perimeter walls of the complex, and that openings be

incorporated to break down its scale. Finally, the change from back-in to head-in angle parking along Huntingdon Street is an improvement.

Relate the scale and architectural character of the project with that of the surrounding communities. Panel members were pleased with changes to the residential units along Maryland Avenue, in particular how retail windows turned the corner at 25th and Maryland and at the entrance to the parking, the treatment of the rear doors to the retail spaces, planters along the building, and the inclusion of a second entrance. Additionally, changing the massing and architectural treatment of the housing to that of a more traditional apartment building rather than mimicking rowhouses was a big improvement.

Architectural Treatment. The relationship between the first floor storefront treatments and the upper floor window patterns of the residential units, whether along Maryland Avenue or interior along the parking lot, is much improved. However, the retail facades on the south end of Site #2 need much more study. The false front approach does not work; these facades should relate more to their neighbors on the east side of the parking lot. Additionally, while the architectural treatment of the residential portion is improved, the architects should give additional study to the following: the size and shape of the cornice seems bulky, the stair tower is awkward and might be removed and integrated into the building, the bay above the lobby does not have the finesse of other parts of the building, and the color of the base material is in too much contrast with the rest of the façade. Also, the brick colored band on the GM building should be eliminated.

Finally, it is recommended that larger scaled sections of elevations of the various buildings and the parking structure be presented in order to better understand the treatment of sills, cornices, windows, bases, etc. and the relief of these features. At the moment, many of the buildings read as very flat and it would benefit the project and its pedestrian scale to have greater relief and articulation.

Integrate and connect pedestrian and vehicular circulation. There is still concern that the pedestrian access through Site #1 is compromised by the vehicular / truck access to the stores (see below) as well as the requirements made by Walmart in front of the store. This includes concerns with the size of the sidewalk along the entrance drive - the space feels tight given the planters and the choice of trees. Perhaps this is a wider sidewalk and the only access rather than on both sides of the entrance. Access to and through Site #1 needs to be of equal importance as access to the Walmart store.

Walmart. While the Panel appreciated the detail provided regarding truck access to the Walmart, the creation of a separate drive lane out of the parking area seems both overkill and questionable as to whether it would actually be properly used. Given the limited amount of truck access and the times of day when it would occur, the Panel would like the design team to consider eliminating the separate drive lane, making service and parking lot entrance simply the 42' for truck access. The trees along the Huntingdon Street elevation of the building are a welcome improvement; more trees along the front entrance façade are recommended to enhance the pedestrian access to the building. On Site #1, the northwest elevation of the building (facing the railroad tracks) needs additional study. While considered the back of the building, the Panel is concerned that this façade will be more visible than expected. Improvements might include how

the brick material turns the corner, the relation between panel joints and column spacing, and how the columns meet the building above. The Panel would also like to see more detail as to how lighting is treated on the Walmart level of the parking lot as there is concern over the height and visibility of the lighting.

Next presentation. In addition to comments made above, Panel members would also like to see additional information regarding signage and retail storefronts.

Several members from the surrounding community made public comments regarding the project. Members of the Historic Fawcett Community were concerned about the height of the wall (they want it to be higher) and the material, recommending that more of the former church's stone be used than simply on the piers. Community members representing Maryland Avenue and the Charles Village Civic Association were in agreement that the Maryland Avenue portion of the project was much improved and that they wanted to see additional improvements made as the design progresses. There was still concern expressed as to the inward nature of the site's development.

PANEL ACTION:

Schematic Approval withheld.

Attending:

Faith Evans, Sam Culpepper, Nancy Liebrecht - Marks Thomas

Donald Kann – Kann Partners

Addison Palmer, Anna Owen – STV, Inc.

Jon Laria - Ballard Spahr

Mark Herbkersman, Robert Gehrman - Brown Craig Turner

Sandy Sparks- CVCA

Judith Kunst - GRIA

Kara Kunst - City Council

Douglas Armstrong - RNA

Megan Hamilton, John Viles - HFCA

Peter Duvall, Cathy Yates, Dan Shub - Old Goucher CA

Chris Carlson - DLH

Al Barry - AB Associates

Mike Birkland - Bowman Consulting

Jay Brodie, Paul Dombrowski – BDC

Bill Cunningham - Baltimore City Planning Commission

Messrs. Bowden, Britt, Cameron and Ramberg – Panel

Tom Stosur, Gary Cole, Gary Letteron, Alex Hoffman, Wolde Ararsa, Erv McDaniel, Anthony Cataldo - Planning

