

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

Date: October 14, 2010

Meeting No.: 116

Project: 25th Street Station

Phase: Continued Schematic / Final

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

PRESENTATION:

Robert Gehrman, of Brown Craig Turner Architects, began with an overview of the changes to the design team (specifically that Brown Craig Turner had taken over from Kann partners) and then went through the revisions made to various parts of the project. In particular, these included:

1. Changes to the configuration of the retail building at 25th and Huntingdon, specifically the change from a concave to a convex corner at the main entrance to the Walmart,
2. The addition of a new retail building at the southwest corner of 25th Street and Howard,
3. Changes to the northern façade of the Walmart,
4. More detailed elevations of the parking garage along 24th Street as well as revisions to the design of the wall along 24th and Sisson Streets,
5. More detailed elevations of the Anderson Building at the southeast corner of 25th and Howard, keeping the original painted brick and storefront windows,
6. Revisions to the retail facades on the interior of site 2, as well as revised elevations to the parking garage.

Faith Nevins of Marks Thomas Architects presented revisions to the residential building along Maryland Avenue. Addison Palmer and Anna Owens of STV presented changes to the site plan, more detailed drawings of the plaza at 25th Street, and recommended plant species. Mr. Gehrman then presented material samples for the buildings, designs for the various types of signage, and lighting.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel complimented Brown Craig Turner and the other members of the design team for a thorough and comprehensive presentation of what is a large and complicated project. The Panel was also very pleased with several changes to the project, including the addition of a building at the southwest corner of 25th and Howard, the addition of retail at the corner of 24th and Howard, changes to the Huntingdon Avenue retail building that better engages the entrance, and the improvements to the wall along Sisson Street. However, members still had several comments and recommendations:

25th Street: The Panel applauded the location of a building at the corner of 25th and Howard, although it was suggested that the building should simply be a building and not try to be a sign tower for the project. Instead, it was recommended that a structure with the Lowe's and Walmart signs would be better located at the entrance to the Walmart. Also, it was recommended again that the bank building be moved to 25th Street to better create a pedestrian edge. Additionally, as shown, the stucco top of the bank building is too heavy. While the changes to the retail building on Huntingdon were viewed positively, the relation of the curved corner, the tower piece with a curved roof, and the choice of materials seem awkward and need further study as to how they relate to one another. Finally, retaining the character and look of the remaining Anderson building on 25th Street was also well received.

Walmart. The addition of trees, landscaping, and windows along the northern edge of the Walmart building is a positive addition. However, the design team was asked again to revisit the front of the Walmart and create a better pedestrian realm through the site rather than simply create a means for arriving at the entrance to the Walmart (one of the goals of the project is "Integrate and connect pedestrian and vehicular circulation"). Also, the Panel asked for information regarding the façade of the Lowe's as well as the location, height, and style of the lighting in the upper parking lot.

Wall along Sisson Street: The treatment of the wall as a well designed wall rather than trying to hide it with planting was well received, in particular the recessed arches. The Panel questioned the inclusion of stone at the top of the brick portion of the wall (suggesting that if it was stone it should be cast stone), whether the stone should creep up the brick wall (or should the wall simply sit on a stone base), and the odd relation of the two full-stone wall panels at the entrance and its relation to the rest of the wall.

Signage along 24th Street. It was recommended that the Lowe's signage be better integrated into the entrances and reduced in size; as depicted it is too large, seems tacked on, and has an awkward relation with the tower feature with a curved roof.

Residential Building on Maryland Avenue. The Panel appreciated the changes made to the building, although it was felt that the composition of the windows and the design of the bay and canopy above the lobby need additional work.

Garage (Site #2). Again, the changes to the garage and the articulation of the blank wall with the arches were well received. In fact, it was recommended that the inset panels did not need the murals and would be better served with additional detailing and emphasis on creating an attractive wall. The addition of retail at the ground floor at 24th and Howard Street was also commended. However, the Panel was in full agreement that the stair towers, between the garage and the residential building and on the interior of the block, seemed out of place and awkward. It was recommended that the stair towers be integrated into the architecture of the garage.

Open Space / Streetscape. The design of the plaza on 25th Street is too segmented; the curving planter in the center should be eliminated and the plaza designed as one space with different edges. Also, a different choice of trees would help to set it apart from the rest of the site.

Finally, it was recommended that the street tree spacing should be closer than shown, with the goal of having trees no more than 30' on center.

Miscellaneous. It was questioned whether the logo for the project was too “Olde Timey” and not reflective of the new nature of the project.

Finally, several members from the surrounding community made public comments regarding the project. In general, they felt that the design team had been responsive to their concerns, in particular the design of the wall on Sisson Street. However, community members asked that as much as possible the salvaged stone be used and visible. Also, they were very concerned with the size of the Lowe’s signage and asked that it be reduced and better integrated into the architecture. They also asked to see the elevation of the Lowe’s / Walmart building that would be visible behind the street wall. Concerns were also expressed as to the mix of retail openings on Maryland and the interior of the site, and how this will work for shoppers. Lastly, concern was raised as to how people will be directed to the Walmart entrance when they are at the corner of 25th and Howard Street.

PANEL ACTION:

Schematic design was approved with comments. The Panel asks the design team to return with their response to the recommendations as well as present the building material samples, additional paving materials and plant lists / images, signage, and lighting so that the Panel can focus more fully on these Final Review items.

Attending:

Robert Gehrman, Mark Herbkersman - Brown Craig Turner Architects

Faith Evans, Nancy Liebrecht - Marks Thomas

Tony Cortea, Addison Palmer, Anna Owen – STV, Inc.

Jon Laria - Ballard Spahr

Caroline Paff - WV

Sandy Sparks- CVCA

Judith Kunst - GRIA

Kelly Ray - Office of Councilman Stokes

Douglas Armstrong - RNA

Megan Hamilton, John Viles - HFCA

Cathy Yates, Dan Shub - Old Goucher CA

Larry Perl - Messenger

Leon Pinkett, Paul Dombrowski, Ben Stone – BDC

Messrs. Bowden, Britt, Cameron and Ramberg – Panel

Tom Stosur, Gary Cole, Alex Hoffman, Martin French, Carmen Morosan, Anthony Cataldo and Bob Quilter - Planning