

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

Date: December 9, 2010

Meeting No: 119

Project: Social Security Administration/New Campus

Phase: Introduction

Location: Wabash Avenue and Mount Hope Drive

PRESENTATION:

The Social Security Administration/New Campus project was introduced by Rich Jordan of JBG, the project developer. Mr. Jordan introduced members of the team including members of JBG, Inc., architectural/engineering firm AECOM, civil engineering firm STV, and local developer Dan Klein.

Jon Miller of JBG explained that the project is a GSA project falling under the Design Excellence program. This project utilizes 11 acres of a 36-acre site that GSA is purchasing from the State of Maryland through the Maryland Department of Transportation. The 11-acre site will hold 583,000 square feet (minimum of 468,000 USF) that is comprised of offices, telecommunications center, cafeteria, fitness center, childcare facility, and 1,076 parking spaces. The project is designed to meet US Green Building Council Certification for LEED Silver and Level IV Interagency Security. The GSA/SSA will hold a twenty-year lease on the site. The Design Excellence Program criteria includes: Building Placement and Site Organization; Site Programming; Architecture; and Security Methods.

Robert Allen, architect with AECOM, explained that, in addition to GSA requirements, the project is considered a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and is required to meet Baltimore City's Urban Renewal Design Guidelines and Requirements for the site. These include: a) higher density development; b) mixed uses; c) orientation of project toward transit facilities; d) pedestrian orientation and connectivity to neighborhood (visually and materially distinct from automobile circulation and parking); e) connected street pattern; f) open space; g) limited and controlled auto parking; h) transformation of Wabash Avenue; i) hierarchy of roads; and j) sustainable design.

The project is organized as a campus with the building set close to and oriented toward the Reisterstown Plaza Metro Station. It is the first major development of the 36-acre urban renewal area, and hence holds a key role in establishing the character of the area. The site plan is organized to establish new linkages through the area by re-aligning a road, to optimize the value of the wetlands by making it both a visual amenity and functional part of the site, and to introduce high quality design. The site will include the new SSA office building with a

pedestrian plaza at the front of the building near the metro, a parking garage, a child care facility sited as an “island” in the new park adjacent to the stream, pedestrian walks through and views to the park, and a 50 foot buffer (security setback) that uses boulders as bollards and, thereby, provides a green and permeable edge to the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE PANEL:

The Panel members were very favorable towards the overall scheme of the campus and especially the design of the new building; however, they felt that certain aspects of the plan were not yet resolved. Comments primarily related to the siting and design of the pedestrian plaza, the childcare facility, and the parking garage, the need to improve the relationship between the campus and the transit facility, and the overall expression of the building’s aesthetic throughout the campus. Specifically,

1. There should be a better connection between the transit facility (metro station) and the pedestrian plaza. The Panel suggests that the designers devise a permanent solution for the location of the bus stop, preferably by integrating the bus stop area into the design of the edge of SSA campus. There needs to be an organized relationship between the building and the transit facilitates, and clear and functional circulation patterns for workers at the SSA who use the buses and metro station.
2. The pedestrian plaza needs to be more enticing. Its design needs to be refined so that it will actually function as the center of activity for the new neighborhood, as is the project goal, rather than become an empty space that is used only for workers walking to and from their offices. Its scale, orientation, and access must be clearly defined if it is to work as planned. The building’s atrium roof has the potential to be the hallmark of the neighborhood, prominently marking this new gathering place and the neighborhood itself; however, its relationship to the plaza, and in turn the plaza’s relationship to the transit facility and the future neighborhood must be carefully studied to ensure the desired result.
3. More work is needed to reinforce the pedestrian, bicycle, and jogging paths and ensure that they work in concert. There should be no conflict with auto traffic.
4. The green space of the campus should be maximized. The relocation of the child care facility is critical to accomplishing this. It is recommended that the child care facility be re-located to the edge of the park (possibly integrated into the parking garage). This would allow the park to be the green setting that the project team is seeking for the project.
5. The entries to the site, especially at the parking garage, need more work.
6. The geometry of the main building should be brought into the aesthetic of the site as a whole. The lack of consistency is particularly evident in the parking garage, which reads as a typical scheme that could be built anywhere. The design (massing and skin) of the parking garage should be studied so that it will be a positive component of the campus, equal to the high

quality of design expressed at the new building and for the campus over all, and expressing the same vocabulary as the main building.

7. There should be a change in scale from the grand ceremonial scale of the pedestrian plaza at the edge to a more intimate scale for the pedestrian paths through the park. The exterior of the site should be coordinated with the interior so that there is a clear sense of public versus private spaces, without loss of a sense of the whole ---a true campus.

PANEL ACTION:

Introduction only. The Panel looks forward to the schematic presentation with a response to the comments above.

Attending:

John Simeon, John Kraus, Craig Ciekot, Rich Jordan, Rod Lawrence - JBG, Inc.

Jon Miller, Robert Allen, Werner Mueller, Irena Savakova - AECOM

Tony Cortea, Susan Williams – STV

Stanley Fine, Caroline Hecker – RMG

Daniel Klein – Klein Enterprises

Ed Gunts – Sunpapers

Jay Brodie – BDC

Ms. Eig; Messrs. Bowden, Ramberg, Britt and Cameron – Panel

Tom Stosur, Gary Cole, Wolde Ararsa, Sara Paraniyam, Anthony Cataldo, Bob Quilter -
Planning