

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

Date: January 6, 2011

Meeting No.: 120

Project: Lexington Square Development (Superblock)

Phase: Schematic

Location: Lexington/Fayette/Park/Howard Streets

PRESENTATION:

M.J. “Jay” Brodie, Director of the Baltimore Development Corporation, provided an updated introduction and background to the “Superblock” project, including the assembly of the properties, the conditions of buildings within the development boundaries, and the need to recognize the significance of the important civil rights event that occurred in the building at Lexington and Howard Streets that formerly housed Read’s Drugstore. Read’s was the location of a sit-in by Morgan College students in January of 1955, one of the first successful sit-ins for desegregation in the nation. He also presented the recent letter of December 22, 2010 from the Maryland Historical Trust that stated it was prepared to approve the proposed design with various conditions.

Bailey Pope, Vice President of The Dawson Group from Atlanta, GA provided an overview of the specifics of the project and how it fits into the retail vision set forth in the West Side Strategic Plan. The mixed-use project would include 178,000sf of retail, 300,000sf of residential, a 725 space parking garage (located on the interior of the block), and a 120 room boutique hotel to be located in the former Brager-Gutman building. A focus of the retail is on “baby” box retailers that need 10,000 – 30,000sf for their stores. Mr. Pope also presented information regarding the contributing buildings that are located within the development – a total of 3 contributing buildings are preserved in whole, 3 have their facades preserved with infill behind, and 6 are slated to be demolished (some of the buildings have multiple addresses). He stressed that a total of 52% of the contributing building facades in the entire project are being retained. Finally, he stated that the historical significance of the former Read’s Drugstore building has only recently come to light to them, but they are working with Baltimore Heritage and other organizations to recognize the history in some way.

Peter Fillat of Peter Fillat Architects then presented an update to the previous plans and elevations shown, including responses to the Panel’s previous recommendations of December, 2008. Along Fayette Street, new construction is proposed that includes a pre-cast gridded residential tower, the parking garage (with a proposed scrim with signage and graphics), and a two-story high retail space at the corner of Fayette and Howard. Along Howard Street the former Pickwick Theater and McCrory’s facades would be retained with new retail and the parking garage behind (one of the lobbies to the parking garage would be behind the Pickwick façade). Along Lexington Street, the former Read’s Drugstore would be demolished as well as

the McCrory's building and Kirby/Woolworth Building, to be replaced with a three - four story retail space at what was referred to as the "100 percent corner". The Brager-Gutman Building and the building to its west along Lexington Street would be retained, completing a preservation strategy of the Lexington/Park Avenue corner of the parcel.. Finally, along Park Avenue new infill was proposed to replace a warehouse addition that was part of Brager-Gutman as well as a portion of the parking garage on what is now a surface parking lot. As to the infill development, Mr. Fillat said that the lower buildings would be masonry with windows and articulation that would be sensitive to its historic neighbors. The residential tower and parking garage, however, would be of a more modern design to reflect its time.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel complimented the development team on the positive changes since the project was last presented, including the retention of the Brager-Gutman building and the generally sensitive treatment of the new construction at street level. The Panel also recognizes the challenges faced by the development team to create retail spaces that respond to a new market and the need to accommodate parking, all within a small scale historic fabric. Panel comments are as follow:

Former Read's Drugstore Building: Given the new information regarding the historic significance of the building, the Panel cannot support the demolition of the building at this time. The Panel requests that the development team, the Maryland Historic Trust and others, with assistance from the Planning Department's Historic Preservation Division, re-evaluate the building and work together to develop an option for retaining the building and commemorating the historic event.

Expression of Existing Historic Character: The Panel was pleased to see additional facades and buildings retained from the previous presentation. However, the Panel would like the development team to explore ways to retain additional historic context, in particular along Lexington Street. The treatment of the infill buildings along Lexington and Howard Street (with the exception of the parking garage) is well done and sensitive to the materials, scale, and articulation of the façade treatments. The Panel believes, however, that there could be even more distinction made between the truly historic structures and the new buildings.

Parking Garage. Although treating the parking garage as a background building is a welcome approach, it needs to have a better compositional relationship to the historic facades in front of it, in particular the Pickwick Theater, McCrory's, and Paul's Luncheonette. Also, the Fayette Street elevation needs additional study. The use of the scrim and the fact that there are no entrances along the street do nothing to create a welcoming pedestrian environment. One suggestion was to consider wrapping the garage or introducing some active street level retail.

Residential Tower: The Panel appreciates that the design team has taken the tower to the ground, but having now seen this resolution is concerned with the height of the building along the street edge, especially since the design guidelines for the area call for a height differential along the street of no more than 20%. However, the Panel still feels that there needs to be a relationship between the tower and the street; additional study is needed to minimize its impact along Fayette. Also, the entrance to the residential tower is awkward and needs to be more prominent and in scale with the building.

As to the tower massing, Panel members were still not comfortable with the “collision” of the two tower wings, in particular the masonry piece that sticks out to the east. A better relationship between the two buildings is needed, with the projecting piece reading as a bay rather than a portion of the other wing. It is questionable as to how evident the visual passing of the masonry wing through the precast wing would be. Also, the Panel supports the concept of a green roof but would like the design team at the next presentation to show mechanical units and elevator overrides that would be located on the roofs.

Public Space. The Panel does not feel that an adequate explanation regarding public use spaces was provided, and would like additional information regarding this. The recognition of the Read’s Drugstore sit-in is an opportunity to provide such a space.

Finally, several people spoke to the importance of the sit-in and the need to retain the former Read’s Drugstore Building, including Larry Gibson of the University of Maryland School of Law, Johns Hopkins of Baltimore Heritage, Tyler Gearhart of Preservation Maryland, Diane Corbett of Douglass Homes, Julie Sandhaus, David Terry of the Reginald Lewis Museum, and Arlene Fisher of the Lafayette Square Association. Several of these individuals, including Mr. Hopkins, Gearhart, and Ron Kreitner of Westside Renaissance Corporation, also expressed the importance of the historic character of the area and the need to retain additional contributing buildings, and were concerned that it was not the right economic model to allow for this. Kirby Fowler of the Downtown Partnership spoke in favor of the project and its need to kick-start new development in the area, and pledged \$100,000 toward commemorating the sit-in.

PANEL ACTION:

Schematic design approval withheld. Response to aforementioned comments required at next presentation.

Attending:

Bailey Pope – The Dawson Company
Peter Fillat, Thomas Keller, John Sangle - PFA
John Smallwood – BLDG
Larry S. Gibson, Jenny Hope, Christeen Taniguchi, Leslie Gottert, Cecil Clarke - Citizens
Johns Hopkins, Julie Sandhaus, Charles Alexander, Eli Pousson – Baltimore Heritage
Tyler Gearhart – Preservation Maryland
David Taft Terry – Reginald F. Lewis Museum
Evan Richardson – Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture
Bill Cunningham – Planning Commission
Shannon Sanders McDonald – Architect
Ron Kreitner – Westside Renaissance
Kathleen Pryor – HABC
Diane Corbett, Vice President Douglass Homes
Denise Whitman – Preservation Society

Arlene Fisher – Harlem Park and Baltimore Heritage

Fern Shen – Baltimore Brew

Melody Simmons – The Daily Record

Daniel Sernovitz – Baltimore Business Journal

Ed Gunts - Sunpapers

Kirby Fowler, Nan Rohrer – Downtown Partnership

Jay Brodie, Kathy Robertson, Michelle Edmisten, David Garza, Paul Dombrowski, Molly

Moyer, Ben Stone, John Thompson, Robert Williams – BDC

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

Tom Stosur, Gary Cole, Kathleen Kotarba, Alex Hoffman, Wolde Ararsa, Anthony Cataldo, Bob

Quilter - Planning