

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

Date: April 14, 2011

Meeting No.: 126

Project: O'Donnell Heights Phase 1

Phase: Schematic

Location: Southeast Baltimore

PRESENTATION:

Lembit Jogi of Baltimore Housing, gave an overview of the revised master plan since last presented to UDARP in April of 2009. Changes included a reduction in the number of units (950 units from 1350 units), elimination of the apartment buildings (except for one senior housing apartment building), the elimination of retail, and a reconfiguration of open spaces. Although the master plan has not been approved, Baltimore Housing needs to proceed with the project; Phase 1 is the initial phase of the development and consists of four blocks located in the southeast quadrant of the development. The area will include 150 housing units (7 homeownership and 143 rental) that are a mix of townhouses, flats, and walk-ups. Parking is in the center of the blocks for residents, with additional on-street parking. Courtney Galiber, of Morris & Ritchie, presented the site plan and discussed the strategy for street tree placement, the location of tot lots and bio-retention areas, and the special treatment of School Street (which divides Phase 1 east and west). Tim Daniel, of ZA+D Architects, presented the architecture of the blocks and houses, including images of the surrounding neighborhood to explain how they were being contextual.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel expressed concern that they were asked to comment on Phase 1 of the master plan even though the master plan had not been completely approved. Given this, the Panel was far more concerned about the siting and architecture of the houses:

Site Plan. Some Panel members questioned the choice of site plan and block configuration, and wondered if there were better layouts. A consensus, however, was that the interior of the blocks were too auto-dominant, especially given that the back yards appeared very small and unappealing. The design team should revisit the size of the front yards and reduce their depth in order to gain a better rear yard and better proportion between private/semi-private, and public spaces. Boston Street was viewed differently, however, as the Panel members felt that given the volume of traffic the houses were too close to the street. Additionally, since most of the houses were rental and the front yards would be cared for by the management company, the use of a landscape zone that created a buffer between the houses/porches and the sidewalk was recommended. Finally, the long length of the rear drive for the homeownership houses with

garages is awkward and too long; free standing garages or some other different treatment is needed.

It was also questioned as to whether there needed to be three tot lots given the small area of Phase 1 and the fact that it is adjacent to an elementary school. The entrances to the parking courts deserve attention; as shown they are very bare. The connection to the school from School Street also needs further study; this is meant to be a primary pedestrian connection but the end of the street is at mid-block to the school and crossing might be a problem. The trash needs to be handled in a more orderly and semi-public manner, and more information regarding the bio-retention areas is needed.

Parking and Streetscape. Other than on School Street, the remainder of the streets had trees planted on the house side of the sidewalk. The Panel would like the design team to look at locating street trees between the curb and the sidewalk to create a safer pedestrian walk. Also, the Panel would like the team to explore whether the overhead wires could be moved, since they impact the ability to have canopy trees on Gusryan and Boston Street. Finally, the angled parking on Stanislaus was not viewed favorably and the recommendation is to make this parallel parking like the other streets, which would eliminate its appearance as a parking lot and also reduce the “gap” in School Street as it crosses Stanislaus.

Architecture of the Houses. Panel members felt that the mix of housing types and the architectural elements were not attractive, if not jarring. While the Panel commends the design team for looking to the surrounding neighborhoods for contextual elements, they feel that the elements chosen by the architects are the wrong ones to emulate. There is too much going on; whether in the diversity of house types, architectural elements, the number of materials and colors, and the jogging back and forth of the house footprints. The architects needed to create a greater unity and sense of hierarchy, and work with proportion and scale rather than trying to copy nearby elements. Particular concerns were:

- the side bays were too large and out of scale, and the ones with the small windows appear forbidding (although the Panel commends the architect for given attention to the exposed sides of the houses)
- dormers are out of scale, as is the large metal “hat” roof on some of the end units (the roof reads too heavy and the slopes are awkward)
- the walk-up unit did not need to be split but should read as one form
- the single story houses had a poor relationship to the adjacent units; they should be designed to read as part of the adjacent house rather than as a small ranch house stuck onto a rowhouse
- It was recommended to give additional attention to the end units and corners of the blocks
- There seems to be no consistency of the “book-end” houses since they are found all over the place
- The porches were a nice feature but the rail treatment needs further study. Where there are no porches a better entry precinct is needed

Ella Broadway, ODH Tenant Council President, spoke about the need for better design and yard space for the units.

PANEL ACTION:

Schematic approval withheld.

Attending:

Andrew Vincent, Mary Claire Davis – GBAHC
Sasha-Gaye Angus – The Michaels Org.
Al Barry – AB Associates
Tim Daniel – ZA+D Architecture
Magda Westerhout – Marks Thomas Architects
Courtney Galiber – MRA
Ella Broadway, Keith Brockington – ODH Tenant council
Lembit Jogi – HABC
Paul Dombrowski – BDC

Ms. Eig; Messrs. Bowden, Ramberg, Britt and Cameron – Panel
Tom Stosur, Will Doane, Amy Gilder-Busatti, Laurie Feinberg, Anthony Cataldo, Bob Quilter -
Planning