

**BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING**  
**URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** August 2, 2012

**Meeting No.:** 151

**Project:** Mechanic Theatre Site Redevelopment

**Phase:** Introduction

**Location:** Charles and Baltimore Streets

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**PRESENTATION:**

Anthony Cataldo, UDARP Coordinator for the Planning Department clarified the intent of this review – to introduce the new plans for the site and comment on the urban design merits of that plan. Other processes, through other entities, addressing primarily preservation issues are on-going and are independent of this review.

John Thompson of BDC gave a brief review of the various regulations including the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan and the Central Business Urban Renewal Plan. With the Department’s Urban Design Goals, together they provide multiple development objectives for the site. Urban design goals include: (but are not limited to) creating an urban pedestrian friendly, mixed use project; enhancing both Charles and Baltimore Streets a primary facades and promote connections to the larger downtown; develop open spaces and connections to Redwood Street; include transit connections within the redevelopment; re-envision the streetscape environment; and clarify vehicular circulation through and into the public realm.

Attorney Stanley Fine representing the developers Howard S. Brown and Arrow Parking, introduced the architect, Shalom Baranes and his staff, who reviewed the basic organization and massing strategies of the new proposal. Utilizing over thirty 3-dimensional alternative massing models, the various advantages and disadvantages of the many schemes were discussed in detail. Issues discussed included the proximity of new facades to existing building faces, sympathetic scalar relationships with those nearby buildings, continuity of on-grade retail frontage buildings and other macro spatial considerations. Elements of the 740,000 sq ft preferred scheme include two high-rise residential towers sitting above a three level retail base with a supporting multi-level underground parking garage. Other site improvements include the elimination of the existing exit ramp and elevator at the southwest corner of Charles and Baltimore, the inclusion of the Metro access within the building development and re-organization of the pedestrian access along Redwood Street.

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:**

The Panel complimented the architect on the thorough and thoughtful study of massing alternatives and felt that the general massing direction of this proposal was heading in the right direction. The Panel suggested that further study would be appropriate in the following areas related to urban design of the presented scheme:

**Overall Statement** – several comments suggested that a more unified design approach, in both materiality and expression, would be welcomed so that the project read more as one project rather than as three strongly different elements.

**Residential Towers** – study the relative difference in heights, or top treatments, of the towers with the intent of determining a formal and significant hierarchy between them. Where possible study continuing the towers to grade in their defining form rather than having them appear to be placed atop a podium.

**Corner and Place** – study the corner treatment of Charles and Baltimore and find an appropriate expression for this critically significant “center” compass-point in Baltimore’s street and quadrant system.

**Retail Expression** – Some concern was voiced about the heavy overhanging masses proposed as part of the retail expression and the dependence on bold signing and “billboards” as the dominant retail statement. Study a retail expression that is more “architectural” and integrated with the towers and corner treatment.

**Pedestrian Environment** – the Panel looks forward to further studies of the entire ground level environment including hard and softscapes as well as the sensitive treatment and relationship of spaces serving retail, restaurant, transit and residential patrons.

**COMMUNITY COMMENTS:**

Some community representatives spoke in favor of retaining the existing building on site while others spoke in favor of the enhanced pedestrian experience proposed with the new scheme. Ms. Kathleen Kotarba clarified the CHAP process as it relates to the existing structures, for which there is a CHAP hearing scheduled for August 14<sup>th</sup>.

**PANEL ACTION:**

No action required – introduction only.

**Attending:**

Shalom Baranes, Dan Stuver, Magd Fahmy, Kristen Linn - Shalom Baranes Architects  
Stanley Fine, Caroline Hecker – RMG  
Ben Greenwald, Mel Greenwald – Arrow Parking  
Skip Anyonucell, Howard Brown, Carmela Bell – David S. Brown  
Mackenzie Garvin- Mayor’s Office  
Molly Moyer – GBC  
Kirby Fowler, Nan Rohrer, Mackenzie Paull – DPOB  
Tyler Gearhart – Preservation Maryland  
Robert Embry – Abell Foundation  
Melody Simmons – The Daily Record  
John Murphy – John Murphy  
Steve Kilar – Baltimore Sun

M. J. Brodie, John Thompson – BDC

Ms Eig, Messrs. Bowden\*, Burns and Cameron - UDARP Panel

Gary Cole, Anthony Cataldo, Kathleen Kotarba, Stacey Montgomery, Lauren Schiszik, Eric Holcomb, Alex Hoffman, Carmen Morosan –Department of Planning