

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

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** September 13, 2012

**Meeting No.:** 153

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**Project:** Baltimore VLT Facility

**Phase:** Schematic

**Location:** Russell and Bayard Streets

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**PRESENTATION:**

Kim Clarke, Baltimore Development Center, provided an overview of the Video Lottery Terminal (Casino) development and location. Greg Miller, Caesars Entertainment, introduced the goals and urban design concepts of the casino, with the primary goal being integration, which included:

- Outward facing
- Connect with local attractions and hotels
- Good fit

He also introduced the ownership team as well as the design team.

Joan Floura, Floura Teeter Landscape Architects, reviewed the site context and site photos, including vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle access as well as the site's relation to the Middle Branch.

Chuck Jones, architect with the Friedmutter Group, presented the design of the Casino and adjoining garage. The Casino footprint is bounded by Russell Street, Bayard Street, Warner Street, and Worcester Street, with the garage located on the east side of Warner Street. The Casino is 2-stories and approx. 60' tall, with a third floor holding back of house facilities set back from the Casino edges. The 4,000 car garage is 700' long and approx. 120' tall.

Mr. Jones described the design influence, regarding materials, was to draw on Baltimore's heritage of brick as well as its more contemporary glass and steel architecture. He also emphasized the Casino serving as a southern gateway from Russell Street, pedestrian connections to M&T stadium, Casino entrances, and the bridge connection between the garage and the second floor of the Casino. A support facility building was shown in plan but minimally addressed in the presentation.

Zolna Russell, Floura Teeter Landscape Architects, presented the site plan including vehicular valet and taxi drop-off, access into the garage, streetscape treatments, landscaping, and paving.

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:**

The Panel complemented the design team for a thorough presentation of a complex project, as well as the projected redevelopment opportunities for Warner Street as a result of the Casino

location. Panel has concerns with the size, bulk, and treatment of the garage, as well as the Casino design and site treatments, including:

Garage. Given the size, bulk, height, and location of the garage, it is the most prominent and visible feature of the Casino complex. While the architect has tried to break down the mass and size of the garage with the addition of the architectural frames and large video screens, these instead accentuate the size of the garage due to their own size. Additionally, these features are visually too busy and overpowering, as well as appearing to be pasted on to the garage structure.

Given the importance of the garage, much more design consideration and attention needs to be given it – it cannot simply be a standard garage with architectural features applied to it. Specifically, the Panel recommended that the garage simplify and that the idea of screen be explored. Other examples of similarly-sized buildings was offered by the Panel – the B&O Warehouse and Montgomery Ward Building – as examples of how the garage structure can be designed with repetition, variation, and scale in a way that does not create a looming structure but one that is honest and elegant (other examples that come to mind are the large mill buildings in the Jones Falls Valley as well as in the Northeast US).

Also, the Panel suggested that the bridge element be used as an integrative element that 1) that extends through the garage to connect the casino to the Middle Branch, and 2) serve as a way to break-up the large mass of the garage into two sections. Better integrating the architecture of the casino with that of the garage (and small service building) would create a unified complex rather than three distinct buildings.

Concerns were expressed about the relationship of the garage to the Middle Branch and possible impacts on habitat and ecosystems, including the shadow that would be cast by the garage as well as lights from the video screens and garage.

Additionally, if the intention was to activate Warner Street, was it possible to locate retail on the northwest corner of the garage (given that approx 100' of garage is at street level beyond the northern edge of the Casino building).

Finally, the size of the garage increased from the previous Casino proposal. It was hinted at that some of the parking would be used by people attending football games. If there is an arrangement with the Stadium Authority, then this should be an opportunity to address the Warner Street infrastructure proactively.

Casino Building. The symmetrical nature of the building was questioned, given 1) the importance given to the southern gateway corner at Russell and Bayard, 2) the internal layout of the building, and 3) the desire expressed by the architect of “form follows function” for the garage. It was recommended that the building also be shaped by its environment so as to create a stronger corner at Russell and Bayard as well as integrate the bridge element along its northern façade. Also, the relationship between the horizontal bands, concrete frames, and vertical strip windows are ill-proportioned in relationship to one another. Finally, the use of brick was questioned – the connection to Baltimore’s heritage was thin and as a material it comes across as wallpaper or pastiche rather than an integral element (like at Camden Yards).

Entrances / Circulation / Streets. Given the number of people entering the Casino at the vehicle drop-off and through the bridge, it was not clear as to the benefit of the chamfered corner entrance at Warner and Worcester (further, the relationship of the bridge to the entrance is awkward). It is recommended that the design team create a single main entrance along Warner that also has the opportunity to better connect to the food and beverage area to the south of the entrance and help activate Warner Street.

Additionally, concern was raised that the vehicle drop-off and pick-up areas function as cul-de-sacs that diminish the pedestrian environment along Warner and compromise the integration between the south and the north ends of the site. It was also not clear how bus entrances, drop-off, and parking would be handled – the Panel would like to see more information about this.

Russell Street also needs further study. While this is not a main pedestrian route, people will be walking here, and some type of edge definition is needed in addition to the 15' sidewalk. While trees are probably not appropriate, the edge provides an opportunity for an architectural treatment that relates to the architecture of the Casino.

Finally, because the Casino can serve as a catalyst for improving the entire area (between the bus station and M&T Stadium), the City should address and improve the streets, sidewalks, and streetscapes surrounding the Casino complex, with initial improvements between the bus station and the Casino.

Site / Landscape. Further development is needed regarding the exterior site treatments. As shown the use of trees and landscaping seem minimal as foundation plantings and not offering a unified environment. Opportunities for this are along the edge of Russell Street and along Warner Street – including using materials and elements that reinforce the architecture (as shown there appear to be 8 – 9 different paving treatments). Additionally, planting along the water side of the garage is needed – it is implied in a section but not shown on the plan.

Miscellaneous.

- The question of the height of the garage in relation to M&T Stadium was asked. The Panel would like to see a drawing showing this relationship.
- A site plan clearly showing the property boundaries is needed, especially along the garage edge.

**PANEL ACTION:**

It is recommended that the schematic design not be approved.

**Attending:**

Craig Wasserman, John Kaminski – KA, Inc

Lee Monfort, Greg Miller – Caesars

Ed Grimsley, Jeffrey Cohen, Adam Suliman – Rock Co.

Chuck Jones – FG

David Hahner, Bob Ryan – Whiting Turner

Bob Rosenfelt, Dawn Clamp, Carla Ryon – CMR  
Caroline Hecker, Stanley Fine – Rosenberg Martin  
Zolna Russell, Joan Floura – Floura Teeter Landscape Arch.  
Rich Miller – The Wills Group Inc.  
Dave Curley – SHC  
Tony Rogers – A+R Development.  
Al Barry – AB Associates  
Molly Moyer – GBC  
Melody Simmons – The Daily Record  
Chris Korman – Baltimore Sun  
Eric Bryant - RLLS

Kim Clark, gary Suskalier, Paul Clary - BDC  
Bill Curtis – CDBG Office – DHCD

Tom Stosur, Anthony Cataldo, Wolde Ararsa, Gary Cole, Natasha Becker, Eric Tiso, Ken Hranicky, Alex Hoffman, Eddie Leon – Planning

Ms. Eig, Messrgs. Cameron\*, Bowden – Panel