

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

Date: June 13, 2013

Meeting No.: 167

Project: Baltimore Redline – Downtown Stations Update

Phase: Discussion

Location: Poppleton, Inner Harbor, Fells Point Stations

PRESENTATION:

Osbourne Anthony of the RedLine, provided a brief overview of the RedLine project and introduced the three locations to be discussed: Poppleton, Inner Harbor, and Fells Point. Each of these is an underground station which requires an above ground opening and a separate ventilation structure. The design development for Inner Harbor and Fells Point stations represents an update to design previously presented to UDARP, while this is the first presentation for the design for Poppleton station.

Werner Mueller, RedLine, reiterated the basic description of the two types of underground stations: two levels (65' below grade) and three levels (80' to 85' below grade). The design approach for the above ground stations is to attempt to relate to the individual neighborhood context while remaining true to the station aesthetic in style (contemporary), form (stations-light and airy sculptural form; ventilation structures- solid rectilinear blocks), and materials (glass, metal, louvered wall surfaces)

The **Poppleton Station** was addressed first. Poppleton is an underground station located at the intersection of Freemont and W. Baltimore Street. Its ventilation system requires a structure 65' high (approximately the size of a 4-5 story building). The design places the station and the structure in near adjacency creating a single site. The free-standing station conforms to the prescribed aesthetic employing a variety of glass (translucent, opaque, and vision) to subtly direct users' to the station entry. A green wall has been included as a screen between the station and its immediate neighbors to the east to provide a sense of separation and privacy. Green roofs are not currently part of the scheme but are under discussion; no solar panels will be used. The ventilation structure is large and bulky, massed in three parts, with a glass and metal scheme that read more like an office building than a utilitarian or industrial structure.

The **Inner Harbor Station** focused on the revisions to the design of the ventilation structure made in response to UDARP comments made at the September 2012 meeting. The presentation did not include an update on the station and its streetscape, which is distanced from the ventilation structure. (*n.b.* AECOM stated that this response will be coming at a future date.) The ventilation structure is located along Lombard Street at the corner of Lombard St. and Grant St. and will displace two existing buildings. The design includes the possibility of approximately 600 square feet of retail or office use at the ground floor.

The **Fells Point Station** is located in a historic neighborhood which makes the relationship of the new design to its context challenging. The free-standing ventilation structure is not adjacent to its associated station entrance piece. Presented as a cube, it is located at the corner of Fleet St. and S. Bethel St. with surface parking encompassing it to its rear and side. As a result, the structure reads as an object on the parking lot.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL

Overall, the Panel feels that the aesthetic approach to the ventilation structures needs to be stronger. The design for the individual stations present a clear and definable image despite being adapted to their individual locations, giving them a strong identity and association with the RedLine. The various designs for ventilation structures have not achieved this cohesion. Solutions include strengthening the boldness of the designs or reducing the design detailing to create less obvious structures that blend into the background. Although there is disagreement among the Panel members as to how best to achieve the cohesion, the Panel is united in its desire to see the design better represent the Red Line and become part of their context.

Poppleton:

The Station -

- 1) The open area surrounding the station needs to be thought out more clearly to avoid dead spaces and to provide clearer directional clues for users. It is not a park but a platform and should be treated more holistically.
- 2) The green wall seems more incidental rather than part of the design whole. Consider extending it to engage with the ventilation structure so that it serves to define the edge of the station site. A fritted glass wall with specialized lighting might be a better solution, although the green wall is a welcome environmental detail.
- 3) Lighting should be both functional and directional.
- 4) Consider the placement of the retail component nearer to the elevators and head-house for most exposure to pedestrian traffic and the adjacent park.

The Ventilation Structure -

Of the three ventilation structures presented, Poppleton is both unique and the least successful. Designed as part of the station setting, it serves as a backdrop to the station structure. It is in close proximity to the station and part of it houses the station's elevator, yet it does not strongly read as part of the Red Line. Its large mass and height is coupled with a skin that reads more like an office building, diminishing the relationship between the two structures. The Panel recommends the following:

- 1) The building skin appears too fragmented and complicated. The visual appearance of floor levels through the glass wall should be omitted. A skin composed to appear as a simple, elegant, light glass enclosure would serve as a better backdrop with a clear association with the station.
- 2) The tri-partite massing is unsuccessful. Consider massing the structure as two components more in keeping with its actual function for both ventilation machinery and as active station passenger support (elevators).
- 3) Consider using lighting and/or fritted glass to provide interest to the exterior walls without distorting its association with the station.

Inner Harbor

The Panel finds the revisions to the ventilation structure have much improved its appearance. Recommendations are:

- 1) Since the alley wall is completely solid, extend the concrete on the alley wall down to the ground level.
- 2) Strengthen the structure's relationship with the street by reinforcing a secondary line at the ground floor, thereby improving the pedestrian's visual experience. Investigate adding additional street trees along this piece of Lombard Street to reinforce the urban edge.

Fells Point

Its location on the corner of a parking lot results in holding a prime location along the streetscape, which will make it the focus of the pedestrian experience. This results in a great design challenge: how does one deal with a structure that is not intended for use by the public, yet is sited as to draw attention to itself. This structure resulted in a long discussion of how to correct this inherent dilemma. The Panel understands that the structure cannot be engaged to nearby buildings and must stand alone. The solution appears to be in choosing whether to strengthen or downplay the structure as an object and not staying in the middle as currently proposed. The Panel offers the following comments:

- 1) The design fails to relate to the Fells Point context, but also does not display a strong association with the Red Line. It's currently 'in the middle' of both of these design directions.
- 2) Consider a **range of alternative approaches** for this special problem and return to the Panel for further discussion
 - a. Consider whether the structure can become an art object
 - b. Consider whether the exterior of the structure can be treated as some type of interactive "board" or art display that could enliven the pedestrian experience.
 - c. Consider whether the structure should be played down in this location and clad with brick

PANEL ACTION:

Discussion only; no action recommended.

Attending:

Osbourne Anthony, Werner Mueller, Susan Willaims, Kristen Gedeon, Neil Murray, Charissa Lue, Roxana Beyranvand, Gil Lehman, Miles Maddox, Ken Griffin, Michael Crowley – RedLine
Nan Roher – Downtown Partnership of Baltimore
Bradley C. Touchstone – Touchstone Architecture
Michael Secrist – Mimar
Hadar Silverman – AECOM

Ms. Eig* and Allen, Messrs. Bowden, Burns and Haresign

Tom Stosur, Anthony Cataldo, Martin French, Carmen Morosan, Kyle Leggs – Department of Planning