

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

Date: November 4th, 2021

Meeting #54

Project: Hamilton Gateway

Phase: Schematic Development

Location: 5713-23 Harford Road

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Samuel Polakoff started the presentation with a quick overview of development in Northeast Baltimore. Charles Alexander of Alexander Design Studio continued the presentation with an introduction to the site and context. This multi-family housing development is near Morgan State University and the Hamilton commercial corridor on Harford Road. The site presents some challenges including changes in grade, a mix of building typologies, and a variety of different setbacks along Harford Road.

Close attention was paid to scale and the neighboring building, which is an L-shaped historic church. The resulting massing reflects the scale and setback of the church. The team has focused on engaging the street while allowing for room at the corner, responding to the building across Harford Road and along the residential portion of White Avenue to the east.

The design addresses the following:

- The gateway condition approaching Hamilton from the south and east, through height and placement of the massing to create relationships with buildings across the street.
- Creating a friendly residential street condition on White Street, with steps and porches for those units, while keeping the more public program elements on Harford Road.
- Capturing the views from Harford Road back toward the downtown area.
- Use landscape to integrate the building while also serving the stormwater needs.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation and continued with clarifying questions.

Clarification:

- *What is the ADA access to the main entrance?* The building is set up to match the elevation on Harford Road, so the front (main) entrance is at grade.
- *What is the access to the green space at the corner, and what is the purpose of that space?* The team is still deciding on the program. Residents will have full access through the front entrance and stair tower. Note that the team considered adding ADA accessible ramp from another location on the site, but the amount of ramping required was prohibitive.
- *What is happening further east on White that makes it a significant design driver? Why is the gateway necessary?* This is one of the few residential streets that continues through to the other side of Harford Road. The church has acts as a marker as one enters the commercial strip, so reinforcing the “gateway” seemed to be a natural approach to the site.
- *What is the driving factor for bringing the front façade up to Harford Road?* The buildings further up in Hamilton all have this condition, as do the buildings across the street. The neighboring buildings to the south have a very suburban feel, with deeper setbacks and parking lots.

Site:

- Use of topography to tuck the parking into the site is applauded.
- Some of the outdoor spaces seem forced. Revising the massing could better incorporate the programmed amenity spaces that are sequenced or collocated. Stormwater could be moved to the front corner and take on a garden-like quality.
- Be purposeful about the programming and design of the open spaces. How do they serve the residents? The community? How do they add to the visual character of the area (in the context of the streetscape, the churchyard, and the adjacent residential area)?
- Harford is very eroded, which makes placement of new construction even more important. Potential to inform other buildings, which could adopt the same setback. Consider the property of the church and even beyond to gauge appropriate setback – using the historic church to determine setback is strongly discouraged.
- If Harford is seen as a future boulevard, then a 10’ setback is more appropriate. Building will really benefit from being pushed in a bit, which will allow for;
 1. Deeper tree edge
 2. Outdoor seating
 3. Direct connection between the main entry and the corner open space

- Team is encouraged to bring the Landscape Architect into the project as soon as possible.

Building:

- Context of the massing is almost entirely fixated on the church, which seems inappropriate. The church is prominent enough to stand out from new construction.
- The building can take cues from the church without mimicking it and remain true to its function. As designed, the building is starting to compete – while the sensitivity is appreciated, it would benefit from revision and editing.
- Tower element is also very literal; opportunity to create visual interest while still relating to the church by eroding the reentrant corner of the residential building in contrast to the protruding tower of the church. Relocating the stair can provide a recessed and daylighted elevator lobby on each residential floor which relates to the church tower in a more meaningful way.
- Revise the massing and place more volume along Harford Road. This will help the building to read in a more prominent way and give it more presence on Harford Road.
- Differentiate the idea about what happens on Harford Road vs. White Ave. with the various building façades. The façades compete as designed, but there are successful elements that can be retained. Editing and refining them will allow them to work together while also addressing the different contexts.
- Simplify the layers along White Avenue – current design seems fussy and creates a departure from the neighboring houses instead of blending in. To address the smaller residential scale, the 4-5 story portion could be strategically setback at the upper floor(s) to appear smaller and relate better to the context.
- It is appropriate to acknowledge the residential porch condition, but actual porches contradict the program of the multi-family housing.
- Building up the mass at the middle, will help to address the massing and scale, while keeping the desired unit count.
- Tonal qualities of the stone – cooler palette – would be appropriate, but the color does not need to be literal copy of the church.

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing the comments above.

Attending:

Samuel Polakoff – Development Team

Charles Alexander – Alexander Design Studio

Carla Ryon – CMR

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Mr. Anthony, Mses. Ilieva, and Bradley – UDAAP Panel

Tamara Woods*, Ren Southard, Jeff La Noue, Reni Lawal, Carmen Morosan, Caitlin Audette –
Planning