

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

**Date:** August 12, 2021

**Meeting #50**

**Project:** Somerset S-4

**Phase:** Design Development

**Location:** 31 Jefferson Street

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Dana Henson gave a brief update of the overall Somerset development. And Sharon Huber-Plano and Ryan Geiger of BCT Architects continued the presentation by walking through the site plan, landscape design, and building design.

Project and Design Point of View:

- 190 units/9 stories/ 2 level parking
- Make each façade have its own identity, but make the building feel cohesive as you move around the building.
- Somerset Street should not feel back of house. Addressed with upgraded material change on façade and roll-up doors such as frosted glass), as well as consolidated loading and parking ingress/egress. Tried to wrap program around to Somerset Street
- Orleans St. façade should “talk to” the City and park façade gestures to the neighborhood
- Simplify the top elevation.
- Announce the residential entrance on Somerset and Jefferson. Has a canopy and goes up façade to make grander entrance. 2 stories of masonry and darker base.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> residential entrance on Central Avenue is required for financing for twinning deal. Design goal is to make that entrance feel secondary and not as prominent as the main entrance.
- Materiality- large floating volumes on the corners and then repeat to make the massing a unified façade.
- South Façade- signage for the neighborhood- broke signage free of the cornice and make it more visible
- Grocery entrance tries to make them feel grander and give a 2 story read with more glass with brick banding. Gives good pedestrian orientation.
- Trying to activate the streets as much as possible.

**DISCUSSION:**

The Panel thanked the project team for their presentations and asked clarifying questions. It was also noted that the building is appropriately scaled at 9-stories along a major corridor.

### **Surface Parking Lots and Site:**

- It is clear that it is challenging to design for the circulation and parking access along Somerset and service area. This is still to be a walkable street. There are still too many ground plane interruptions between Orleans and Jefferson.
- Somerset Street still has a conflict between the grocery shopping public and people just passing on the street, cars, etc and trying to get to surface lots or cross the street.
- Look into a dedicated grocer “cross walk” that would be adjacent to the primary crosswalk and could be managed. Will highlight dedicated crossing zones and give flexibility of width and depth of crosswalk along Orleans. Needs more study in context of the continuous pedestrian system along Orleans.
- Lot B new curb cut onto Somerset is not recommend. Needs to have some continuous sidewalk. They will use this side more than the service side sidewalk.
- Green area behind church should be developed into something more meaningful. Integrate sidewalk and edge needs to be studied. Mitigate visual of the loading bays across the street.
- Study the Orleans Street seat wall more so it is more intentional. The Orleans Street seat wall is nice but take careful consideration of the types of plantings. Don’t want it to become a trash collector. Maybe pocked seating.
- Concerns on overloading on Somerset Street. Raised table crosswalk is good, but the pinch point entry in the parking lot is not appropriately scaled. Consider how carts move back and forth in masse. If not handled correctly it could lead to cut throughs on green buffer being eroded for people trying to make their way around and navigate the cross walk and multiple turns.
- The green buffer below parking on Orleans is good and Somerset streetscape is looking like a more deliberate streetscape, but needs to go further to creast urban continuity. Carry the Orleans Street feel around the corner so that it doesn’t feel like an alley.
- Reduce curb-cuts on Somerset and increase pedestrian focus of parking lots with more trees. SWM passive greenspace will erode in quality. Needs a purpose and an owner. Maybe let the adjacent church or another entity program it so it looks occupied.
  - Study the nature of the urban because it is important to set the tone of urban vibrancy. South edge Orleans Street) – go back and study the balance of the urban edge treatment between that of the needs of the grocery store and those of the neighborhood. It is fine line, so it doesn’t feel that the grocer is overtaking Orleans Street. The street should feel/operate like a regular neighborhood street without appearing it’s all about the grocer.
  - The urban street edge breaks down at Somerset and Orleans.

- Consider how people will use ride share services or other pick up/drop off for patrons. May need to study the path people will take to access the Orleans St. curb line through the edge landscaping at the corner.
- Explore more how the sidewalk on Orleans in front of parking lots relates to the streetscape and continuity from outside the grocery store. Agree it is a difficult edge, but is important to show.

### **Building:**

- Overall good improvement on the building since the last review. The approach of how key elements are organized is more successful than before. South facing façade is more meaningful and works with scale of building
- Wrapping some corners and open with framing elements works.
- West faced is better. The ground plane is more coherent and good pedestrian scale.
- The terraces at the top of building are working and elevate the quality of the building
- Central Ave and Park façades still need work. Though the park design is not yet known that façade still has a too formal quality to it. The field within the frame is still expressing itself too vertically. Façade should be more playful and slightly more organic to match the park. Be more granular with a bit more horizontality. Possibly lose every other vertical element. Study window organization and bay count.
- Top element of park façade parapet registers as heavy handed and awkward. Make more delicate. Other facades are treated as a brow, but not on Central and Jefferson Streets. It doesn't have to replicate but bring back in harmony.
- Enjoying the color palette and beginning to organize the building elements in a way that's meaningful
- The extra floors give the verticality it needs by embracing the midrise language. It is appropriate as an anchor. Proud corner on Orleans is working well and signage is good.
- Two story base is working well and the one story carried around is tying everything together.
- Color palette change is successful. It clarifies the volumes, but the material palate is a little busy with the 3 colors of brick and then white siding and panels.
- The proud white volume on Orleans and Central is the most visible volume and white horizontal siding is of concern and how it will be detailed and executed. It can detract from the look and design quality. Executing in brick will make it sharper. Understand whole building should not be brick but primary corner needs to be elevated. Some great and successful moves on the corner base.
- Use of orange brick/ generic color brick is detracts from the project and is dated. A lot of projects like this that pull it back 10 years. Try to be more bold and expressive.
- Continue to study the park façade. It warrants more attention and a unique identity. The yellow façade is the only one that will be seen from afar. This façade should be in the same language as the others, but its own variation and needs to be elevated.

**Next Steps:**

Continue design addressing comments above.

**Attending:**

Ryan Geiger, Scot Fowler– BCT Architects

Sharon Huber-Plano- STV Inc.

Dan Henson, Dana Henson – Henson Development

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

Tamara Woods, Caitlin Audette – Planning