

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

**Date:** November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Meeting #54**

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**Project:** JHU Student Center

**Phase:** Design Development

**Location:** Charles Street at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street

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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

Lee Coyle of Johns Hopkins University gave a brief reintroduction of the project. A main goal of is to transform the intersection of Charles and 33<sup>rd</sup> from a barrier to the campus into a gateway entrance to the campus. Leon Rost of Bjarke Ingles Group continued the presentation with an overview of the site and context. This site acts as the informal front door of the Johns Hopkins University Campus and connects to the urban fabric on the east side. Thousands of students pass through this point every day.

The team has employed the architectural concept of a village to inform design. The village concept was derived from the many student organizations, the vibrance of the surrounding neighborhood, and the idea that this building would serve both populations.

**The revised design addresses the following:**

- Many roof planes to increase day-lighting opportunities and offer more porosity between the interior and exterior spaces.
- The building footprint has shrunk by approximately 10' on all sides, freeing up more space on the site.
- Landscape has not changed drastically, but responses are site specific and sensitive to context; the landscape is brought up to the building and engages with it instead of being a barrier.
- Foot traffic in and around the building has been studied and improved; sloping site makes circulation challenging, but reducing the footprint allowed for direct first floor access on the south side, and direct access to the second floor on the north side.
- Radial organization for the site and building has been refined; a goal of the building is to accept and invite people from 360 degrees.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation and continued with clarifying questions. It was noted that the responses were addressed verbally, but the drawings did not necessarily address the comments.

## **Clarification:**

- *The building completely interrupts the exterior circulation – it seems that the access to the campus is still through the building. Was the suggestion to provide a path through the building from the neighborhood to the campus addressed?* No, the primary route rings the exterior of the building.
- *What is the accessible, barrier-free route from 33<sup>rd</sup> Street?* The only accessible path is through the building or take the path along the north side of campus. The University is ok with this condition, the Beach (circular grassy node to the north) is the official entrance, and this building will act as a gateway. It is open to the public and will be the welcoming threshold for students and public.
- *How does the building respond functionally to the exterior, are the uses separated from the landscape; how do the interior and exterior programs engage with each other?* The dining spaces along the south, multi-use spaces are placed next to entrances.
- *Is there anything that reinforces the sequence of entry, arrival, etc. in the landscape?* Density of trees and plantings give cues to use, and there is seating planned (but not necessarily drawn or identified).
- *What is the plan for shading the dining terrace, and what is the intent for this space?* The original program called for open space, for tables and tents – earlier design with trees in the middle was revised. Trees on the east will give some morning shade, but trees previously located on the terrace have been removed. The true intent for the space is dual – big events and flexible dining with lightweight furniture that can be moved into the shade as it shifts.
- *Are there changes to the power plant building?* Yes, a portion of the building will be taken down, and the massive cooling tower will be re-clad in a separate project. There are also some changes to the service drive.

## **Site – General Comments:**

- The team is reminded that, in general, the purpose of UDAAP is to positively impact significant projects in Baltimore City. Comments are meant to move developments toward a positive public realm experience, ensure longevity of the built environment, and create cohesion between old and new urban fabric. Comments need to be addressed in drawings. If the program needs oppose the Panel's comments, this opposition should be addressed by clarifying programmatic intent.

- Comments are meant to impact the overall concept, architecture, landscape, and integration of the building with the context.
- Beautiful plant palette and sculpting of the earth improve the experience, but do not speak to the building – where is one expected to stop and enjoy these elements? Better integration would address some of this challenge.
- More broadly, the intention of exterior program needs to be refined and clarified.
- Plaza / dining terrace area – needs more study and articulation or it will feel very empty when not populated with events (which will be most of the time). Shade needs consideration, as this will add to vacancy of the space in hot seasons.
- Tree preservation will be especially important on this site – mindful construction practices will help preserve trees. Critical for the natural elements to be preserved if the “tree-house” like renderings
- Landscape should be considered as a continuous experience. A building with a great landscape around it can still feel discontinuous. It is not too late to stitch the building and landscape together to ensure a stronger presence and positive user experience.

### **Building Integration and Site Circulation:**

- There is a departure with how the inside and outside [of the building] interface with each other. Despite the transparency, there is not a clear circulation through the building. The architecture should guide users – students, guests, neighbors – through but it does not yet achieve the inviting nature the team has discussed.
- The building seems to be less of a portal and more of a gate house – moving through is not intuitive. Even within the building, the path through seems a bit circuitous.
- The building hours will impact how people navigate the site unless it’s open 24 hours, 7 days per week.
- Rectilinear grid reinforces the hard lines of the building, creating a rigid edge; this condition fights the grade and seems imposed in the landscape. A more organic form would respond better both to the grade and the circulation.
- Drop off area does not create a direct route to the ADA accessible portions of the site. Proximity and colocation of the drop-off and monumental stepdown seem counterintuitive.
- This building is where everything comes together; the every-day experience needs to be orchestrated. Individual pieces seem to have been considered, but they are not yet working together. The team is encouraged to connect these different pieces by thinking through the daily experience to ensure vibrant, exciting experience. Have dinner with the building in a metaphorical sense. Consider different times of day, seasons of the

year – well-designed spaces have the potential to be used all year round. If these spaces aren't designed properly, they risk creating a barren spot in the landscape.

**Next Steps:**

Continue design addressing the comments above.

**Attending:**

Lee Coyle – Johns Hopkins University

Leon Rost, Lisa Egan – BIG Architects

Matthew Urbanski - Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc.

Chris Hillebrand, Dan Loveless -

Ed Gunts – Baltimore Fishbowl

Elizabeth McDonald, Jennifer Mielke, Alanna Klos, Alexia Friend, Rob Klinedinst – Attendees

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

Tamara Woods\*, Ren Southard, Matt DeSantis, Chris Ryer, Caitlin Audette – Planning