

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

Date: September 9, 2021

Meeting #51

Project: Harbor Point, Parcel 4 Hotel

Phase: Design Development

Location: 1000 Wills Street, Fells Point

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Michael Beatty began the presentation with a brief overview of comments from the previous UDAAP meeting (meeting #44) and an explanation of how the team has addressed them, especial focusing on the building. The team will address the landscape comments in a separate presentation to the Panel but today will highlight the architecture, which has changed significantly. The team has carefully considered the context of Fells Point, a recommendation from previous meetings. In addition to changes based directly on the Panel’s comments, a floor has been added to the building to allow view corridors through the site.

Todd Harvey of BHC continued the presentation with a brief review of the site layout and a comprehensive description of what has changed.

Changes to the project include:

- The hotel shape has been refined and opened up on the ground floor to relate better to the “linear park” – this was possible with the addition of the extra floor as mentioned in the opening remarks.
- Some utility spaces on the east side will be windowless, but the team has addressed this through intentional integration into the rhythm of the façade.
- Balconies have been removed to allow the corners of the building to come together.
- Building has changed dramatically, including materiality, removal of cantilever and balconies, introduction of arches, etc.

To conclude the presentation, Alex Beatty discussed the rationale of the significant changes. The previous design attempted to address the two neighborhoods, historic to the east and new to the west, with the different sides of the building. The intent of this new, radically revised building proposal attempts to blend the new with the old more seamlessly.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their presentation and for their willingness to make changes; then continued with clarifications and questions before giving comments.

Clarifications:

- *What occurs at the acute angle (north corner)?* The two panels come together, and a glazed slit is set back to allow a view through the bricks.
- *Access points – will there be large doors into the utility spaces?* The openings have been consolidated and concealed, there will be one door.
- *Considering previous Harbor Point development, this is a radical departure. Philosophically, how does this fit in with the rest of the new development?* Buildings have a mix of contemporary and historic materials, but the guiding principles are simplicity of material palette and architecture. This building attempts to tie back to the history of the neighborhood with the red brick. Detailing was carefully considered – clean and contemporary – to give it a new look.
- *Are the landscape architects involved in the development?* Yes, the landscape architecture team (Mahan Rykel) is working closely to develop the design in tandem with the building. The team has been involved in decisions to include the garden, bringing the building to the ground, etc. Architecture was ahead of the landscape, which impacted the decision to leave the landscape out of today's presentation.
- *What is the width of the sidewalk in the southeast corner?* It is a standard 5' – 6' width.
- *Does the landscape offer urban experiences; how does it integrate the building with the neighborhood?* All arches are activated with retail, restaurant, lobby, except for two or three that conceal equipment. Flood plain presents a grade change at the north corner. Glass façade on the east side is not porous because entrances need to address the grade difference and are therefore on the west side.
- *What is the intent of the corner as it meets the ground?* Retail at the north corner is expected to spill out and invite people into the park. Restaurant at the south corner is expected to be very active, serving 3 meals a day. The intent of the corner is to be active and draw people into the site.

Site:

- The project team has the benefit of understanding the full intent of the design, and without the landscape, the Panel does not have that advantage. Because so much of this project is about the context, it is imperative to include the landscape in the presentation, even if just a simple diagram. This is especially true for such a difficult site.

- Building and landscape are married – landscape is more than just a selection of plants. How the building meets the ground is crucial and will be impacted significantly by landscape design decisions.
- Arch language speaks to a loggia; team is encouraged to test this idea by pushing the glazing in a few feet to look at how a loggia might fit.
- Landscape and loggia will help bridge the indoors with the outside of the building.
- Harbor Point’s success can be attributed to larger program and buildings that have balanced relationships with a variety of open spaces – these earlier buildings don’t simply meet the ground; they address the context carefully through transition from one type of space to another. This building is attempting to do the same but needs more work due to the difficulty of the site and edge context (old meeting new).
- The project sits on a dynamic site – this proposal explores the energy of the site, which is exciting. The architecture can capitalize on the energy, continuing the street level experience while respecting the historical charm of Fells Point.
- Opening the ground level along the west side is applauded. This move improves the quality of the space and relates better to the linear park.
- Key moments where people are brought into the park should be more porous (specifically at the corners). Integration of access points is essential to making the project active on all sides.
- Retail space closer to the street would be friendlier; consider pushing this proposed use closer to the north corner.
- Using the podium to parallel the slope of the street will not hurt the overall appearance of the building while making it more accessible.
- Ramps, stairs and tall wall have the opportunity to be more integrated to feel like a series of terraces. Taking this approach will help to invite activity and ease the edge of the building mass.

Building:

- This building is an opportunity to use classical elements sourced from the neighborhood and translate them to a sculptural, weightless mass. The corners could be turned in an unexpected way, releasing the top from the base and creating a truly exciting building that responds to the energy of the site.
- Team is encouraged to revisit the idea of a box floating above the base – elements of the previous idea were strong and could be applied here. Address the philosophical approach of the building, does it want to be a base and a top?
- As designed, the expression of the top is very homogenous; solids and voids created by the organization of windows read as series of planes that wrap the building – this contributes to a confusing read needs to be resolved.

- The proposed materiality can potentially work but needs execution and detailing will need careful consideration.
- Consider the activity on Thames Street – the contemporary quality of the previous building was appreciated. The red brick response is literal, and very expected.
- It is important to distinguish truly activated spaces where interior and exterior connect through human activity from ones that have just visual transparency through a sheet of glass. The former would help connect the building to its context by providing not only visual but also physical porosity.
- Very classic motif with contemporary detailing, but simple study of brick color is needed. Red brick can contribute to dated look and if not detailed well could appear flat and cheap.
- If executed properly, this building has the opportunity to be iconic. Use arches to create spaces, not just as formal elements.
- Make the language at the corners consistent to only cantilever arches with the exception of the north corner in order to allow for the building to ‘float’ above the arches and integrate/anchor into the landscape on the north side.
- Maintain proportion and language of windows but consider reducing the noise and busyness of grille at every window with a simple glass panel instead.
- Study the scale of the base with consideration to the arches and nearby buildings.
- Arches coming to a pinpoint are distinctive and have potential to create extraordinary space, but carefully consider the proportions of the arch.
- The details and execution of the simpler palette are going to be very important to make this project successful.
- Suggested precedent for contemporary use of arches: David Adjaye condo building in New York (130William.com).

Next Steps:

Continue design addressing comments above.

Attending:

Todd Harvey, Peter Duke – BHC Architects

Michael Beatty, Alex Beatty, Max Beatty, Jonathan Flesher, Chris Seiler – Beatty Development

Melody Simmons – BBJ

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

Tamara Woods*, Eric Tiso, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, Matt DeSantis, Jeff La Noue –
Planning