

The Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee (PYDAC)

March 4, 2020

7:00pm to 9:00pm

City Hall Sister Cities Conference Room (1101)

Adopted at May 6, 2020 PYDAC Meeting

Committee Members in Attendance:

Jason Albers – Chair (Architect/Potomac Yard Area Rep.)
Jeremy Fretts (Architect)
Travis Herret (Potomac West Rep.)
Matthew Johnston (Landscape Architect)
Peter May (National Park Service Rep.)
Kristen Nunnally (Potomac East Rep.)
Amol Vaidya (AV) (Civic Association in Potomac Yard Rep.)
Corey Faherty (Potomac West Rep.)
Jeremy Moss (Excused)

Absent:

Francisco Duran (Potomac East Rep.)

City Staff:

Sara Brandt-Vorel, Urban Planner, P&Z
Dirk Geratz, Principal Planner, P&Z

Applicant Representatives:

Cathy Puskar, Walsh Colucci Lubeley & Walsh (JBG SMITH/Lionstone)
Ken Wire, Wire Gill LLP (Virginia Tech Foundation)
Bailey Edelson, JBG Smith
Liza Morris, Virginia Tech
Sven Shockey, SmithGroup Architects
Rob Holzbach, Hickok Cole Architects
Jeffrey Shiozaki, COOKFOX Architects

AGENDA ITEMS

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Overview**
- 3. Applicant Presentation of Mass, Height, Scale and Architectural Character of Group 1 Buildings- Phase 1 Redevelopment of North Potomac Yard**
 - a. Building 7W
 - b. Building 10
 - c. Building 14
 - d. Pump Station
- 4. PYDAC Summary Discussion**
- 5. Public Comment**
- 6. Next Steps (Staff)**

7. Motion to Adjourn

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:05pm. Introductions were made of all attendees at the meeting. Minutes from February 5, 2020 were adopted by with a motion by Mr. Fretts and seconded by Mr. May.

APPLICANT PRESENTATION

Ms. Puskar commenced the applicant presentation with an overview of the design process. Mr. Wire, representing Virginia Tech, echoed Ms. Puskar's statements and expressed Virginia Tech's excitement to be in Alexandria and provided a brief overview of Virginia Tech's propose phasing. Ms. Edelson provided an overview of Potomac Yard's history and how its past railroad uses provided character inspiration for the site's design and architecture.

Building 7W

Ms. Morris, the architect for Virginia Tech, introduced a vision for the campus as an opportunity for a new, bold, urban identity for the University. Key elements of the building design were focused on sustainability and resiliency while the overall building massing was guided by computational analysis for solar generation. Mr. Shockey, with SmithGroup Architects, provided an overview of the site plan and iterated on the importance of all building facades and site porosity. Mr. Shockey iterated the design based on solar computations and the building's skin materials will focus on reducing carbon and may integrate Photo Voltaic cells into the building façade.

Mr. Fretts inquired if the southern edge of the northernmost building was considered a signature façade, to which Mr. Shockey responded that all sides of the building were critical. Mr. Fretts asked if there was a vision to link the three buildings together. Ms. Morris responded that the other two buildings were funding dependent, but the future building design and programming will drive how the structures are physically connected.

Mr. Herret asked about the campus programming to which Ms. Morris responded that it would be an academic program focused on graduate level classes such as computer engineering with the possibility of some business-oriented degrees. Mr. Herret responded that he was concerned that the activity on site on the weekends would be low and encouraged the applicant to further integrate the ground floor of the building with the community. Ms. Morris acknowledged the ground floor would be designed to be glassy and encourage transparency and interaction at the ground plane.

Mr. Johnson inquired about the programming of the landscaping, to which Ms. Morris replied the design was built around the concept of large exterior rooms. Discussing that the hub was a place to receive people at the end of the retail street into the campus. More northern outdoor spaces were access by compressing into a portal and then emerging into a larger space – similar to a portal experience on the Blacksburg campus with traditional academic style buildings.

Mr. Herret expressed interest in seeing how the proposed Hokie Stone could be integrated into a faceted surface. Mr. Herret also encouraged a unique design and appreciated the idea of being able to identify the building when flying in from National Airport. Mr. May inquired as to what was

driving the total building height of 180 feet. Mr. Shockey responded that the total height was driven by an average floor to floor height of 15 feet, which was needed to provide flexibility for lab spaces, along with penthouses being incorporated into the design.

Mr. May questioned the context of the gem's shape and inquired if it would glow at night given the high percentage of glass and therefore what would be visible from the parkway. Ms. Morris clarified that it was a mixture of materials with the glass and Mr. Shockey clarified a design principle of overall transparency with the glass but weaving in a layer of warmth. Mr. May added, the use of fins and other scrim could mitigate light spill (especially as seen from the parkway). Mr. Fretts stated it was an opportunity to play with the layering of texture to achieve solar energy and design. Mr. Albers also encouraged a judicious application of various materials across the building.

Building 10

Mr. Holzbach provided an overview of Building 10 and introduced the primary uses as office space with an incubator for Virginia Tech. Stating that the two towers would utilize a shared ground floor to bring building tenants together. Mr. Holzbach defined the proposed building skin as a veil which was an opportunity to see through the building but protecting the ideas inside; like an incubator which protects new ideas. Furthermore, the design pulled on the convergence of rail tracks and would seek to use a materiality with a warm but slightly industrial character.

Mr. Johnson inquired about the programming of the north vs south tower. Mr. Holzbach responded it was about half incubator and half market-rate office. Mr. Johnson stated he likes that the design to push the northern tower back and inquired if the rooftop was public or private space. Mr. Holzbach explained the rooftop is open public space, intended for Virginia Tech or tenants.

Mr. May inquired about the materiality of the tubes within the veil to which Mr. Holzbach answered the final design was still being developed but looking at metal, high-performance concrete. Mr. May inquired of there would be glass behind the veil and what percentage would be open, such as 90% or 70% open and what degree of visibility would be expected. Mr. Holzbach responded it would likely be more open than not and the design utilized a five (5) foot module to minimize the disruption of the views, probably close to 90% open. Mr. May iterated concerns about visibility from the parkway and glass office buildings; stating there are many in the region and when they're all lit up at night and highly visible from the Parkway. Mr. Herret asked if all the facades were flat, to which Mr. Holzbach replied, yes.

Mr. Moss echoed staff concerns about articulation of first floor and the flatness of the proposed veil. Mr. Moss also stated the need for consideration on the pedestrian experience especially given the high heat in the summer and asked the applicant to explore options to provide shade for pedestrians. Ms. Edelson stated their typical approach for ground floor programming in an urban setting, would be to work with retailers to have their expression to come out on the ground floor. Mr. Johnson asked staff for clarity on comment about space to which Ms. Brandt-Vorel provided an overview of staff's comment.

Building 14

Mr. Shiozaki, with Cook Fox Architects introduced Building 14 as an office building with an approximate height of 115' feet. Mr. Shiozaki stated the design theory was rooted in a sense of place with an ecological emphasis of people finding pockets of nature and identifying an important connection between nature, health and well-being. Explaining the site design, the Market lawn at the north is designed to pull activity into the building lobby from the park. While the urban garden room concept brought the outdoors in to create an indoor-outdoor public space. The solar orientation of the building used fins to capture thermal performance and sunlight while simultaneously reducing glare for tech companies. Mr. Shiozaki iterated there were vertical fins on east and west and horizontal fins on north and south along with terraces and spaces for outdoor use across the building which were imperative to maximize human interaction.

Mr. Fretts stated the precedent studies were very inspiring, especially how nature was integrated, however he felt less inspired with building design which appeared flat and ignored the relationship with the ground floor. Mr. Shiozaki stated the first floor was continuing to evolve and ongoing studies were looking at carving the top of the building and varying the building massing. Mr. Fretts added the integration of nature could be shared across the campus.

Mr. Fretts asked staff for clarification about their comment requesting a cooler color for Building 14. Ms. Brandt-Vorel stated staff wanted to ensure a balanced composition across all buildings in Phase 1 and several buildings had indicated a warm color palette, therefore this was an opportunity to explore cooler tones. Mr. Shiozaki stated the team was still exploring materials.

Mr. Herret added he would like to see more wrapping around corners and maybe carve the ground floor. Mr. Albers inquired about the integration of the garden room and suggested it is maybe carved into the building in a way that relates to the carvings on upper floors. Mr. Albers stated he appreciated the contrast between the carve outs and loggias along the façade which overall emphasizes a glass box but the areas which are carved away show something special that emphasized nature. Mr. Johnson inquired about the east side of the building to which Mr. Shiozaki responded there were primarily loggias to balance out the composition and create pockets of ecology. Mr. May inquired why the southern end of the building had terrace instead of the north to provide views of the river. Mr. Shiozaki stated they were still exploring rooftop terrace locations but southern terraces are typically used more.

Mr. Herret asked about the design of the proposed screening of symmetrical fins balanced with the asymmetrical carveouts along the building. Mr. Shiozaki responded that the team was still studying the spacing of the fins and future iterations may show more variety. Mr. Herrett echoed that additional variety in the fins would be preferred. Mr. Fretts offer his perspective that the building massing could appear as three smaller buildings but if that were the case to really make it look like three buildings and continue to evolve the design. Mr. Fretts inquired about the integration of ventilation and how building airflows could be used to achieve additional sustainability. Mr. Shiozaki stated the team had yet to bring on mechanical engineers. Mr. Fretts encouraged the integration of the building science, such as ventilation, into the building design and architecture, stating that if the building science is important it should be on display. Mr. May concluded the discussion discouraging the use of a white metal which may look dirty and tired within a few years in an urban environment.

Pump Station

Ms. Puskar introduced the Pump Station as an element of the necessary infrastructure for North Potomac Yard and the applicant's objective of integrating the building into the Park. Ms. Puskar stated the initial design was still evolving but the goal was to provide something that could illuminate or beautifully activate the park and augment the experience.

Mr. May echoed his support of integrating the infrastructure into the park and considering the design as an architectural folly that could be enjoyed and interacted with as an element of the park. Mr. Fretts encouraged the idea of bright color or pops of color within the design.

PYDAC Summary Discussion

Concluding thoughts:

Ms. Nunnally inquired about the space in the Virginia Tech campus while the other buildings are coming on board. Ms. Morris responded the goal is to develop as much of the site with the first building which is a challenge with the underground parking required with future development. Ms. Morris stated a possible strategy would be to build out as much areas of green which are not above underground parking and start programming green areas.

Mr. Johnson inquired as to Elkus Manfredi's role in the project: Ms. Edelson responded they were the master planners of the project.

Mr. Albers inquired who was responsible for designing the park, to which Ms. Puskar responded that OJB is working on the design which is slightly behind that of the buildings.

Mr. Herret inquired if there would be signage proposed to which Ms. Puskar responded that a comprehensive plan would come forward to address square footages, locations and wayfinding signage.

Public Comment

No questions were raised by members of the public.

Next Steps (Staff)

Motion to Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:37 p.m.