

*Minutes*  
Baltimore County Design Review Panel  
April 8, 2015

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**Adjournment of the Panel Meeting**

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Minutes – February 11, 2015 Meeting, as approved

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Baltimore County Design Review Panel  
April 8, 2015

**Call to order**

Chair, John DiMenna, called the regularly scheduled meeting of the Baltimore County Design Review Panel to order at 6:00 p.m. The following panel members were:

**Present**

Mr. John DiMenna  
Mr. Mitch Kellman  
Mr. Ed Hord  
Mr. David Martin  
Ms. Melanie Moser

**Not Present**

Mr. Bill Monk  
Mr. Richard Jones  
Ms. Julie Kirsch

County staff present included:

Andrea Van Arsdale, Kathy Schlabach, Laurie Hay, Matt Diana

**Minutes of the February 11, 2015 Meeting**

Mr. Hord moved the acceptance of the February 11, 2015 draft minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Martin and passed by acclamation at 6:01 p.m.

The approved minutes are filed as Appendix B.

## **ITEM 1**

**PROJECT NAME:** Flats @ 703, 703 Washington Avenue

**DRP PROJECT #:** 565 (PAI# 9-819)

**PROJECT TYPE:** Residential, Towson

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

David Karceski, of Venable LLP, gave a brief introduction of the project and project team to the panel. The applicant is proposing to develop a 7-story residential building with 5 stories of apartments (105 – 1 or 2 bedroom units) and 2 stories of parking with access to the parking off of Joppa Road and Washington Avenue. Streetscape improvements are proposed to conform to the Towson amenity streetscape standards.

The property consists of approximately 1.318 acres of land zoned BM-CT and is located in both the Towson Design Review Panel area and Towson Commercial Revitalization District. Approximately 0.544 acres of the site are occupied by the existing SunTrust Bank and off street surface parking spaces that serve the bank. The remaining 0.774 acres of the site are the subject of PAI# 9-819 Development Plan process and the Design Review Panel process. This project is unique in that the Hearing Officers Hearing was already begun, but was continued due to the approval of a county resolution which requires the DRP review of residential projects in Towson.

Landscape Architect Hank Allinger of Bohler Engineering described the general site location and the proposed site design. Parking is accessed at the second level from an entrance on Washington Avenue, and at the lower level at an entrance from W. Joppa Road. There is also on-street parking on W. Joppa Rd. The main building entrance is at the corner of Washington and Joppa; however, there is a smaller controlled access lobby entrance on York Road with a patio wall and small common area. Bioretention planters are located on the Washington and W. Joppa sides of the building, and landscaped buffers are placed to screen the project from the adjoining the SunTrust and Enterprise properties. The streetscape is consistent with the improvements across the street on Washington Avenue and follows the Towson standards. Rollout dumpsters will be accessed and stored in the building at the southeast corner of the building. A 10'x60' dog pet run area is located on the east side of the building for use by the residents.

Architect Steve Moriak of Dwell Design Studio described the architectural design and showed a fly-through of the project. The first floor consists of the main entrance and lobby for the leasing agent at the corner of Joppa Road and Washington Avenue. The remainder is the first level of the parking garage with a freight elevator. On the second level, in addition to the parking garage, there is a smaller York Road residential lobby with an interior corridor leading to a centrally located elevator, and a community room with recreational and fitness equipment. On the roof of the building there is a centrally located, 1500 square-foot amenity space which incorporates planters, a water feature, bar and grill, stone paving and screen walls to hide unpleasant views and the rooftop condenser units.

The exterior walls of the first two levels are brick, except at the entrance where stucco will be used to accompany the significant amount of glazing. Cementitious siding and stucco comprise the exterior wall finishes for the remainder of the building. The stucco will be painted. Control joints will be located at 144 square-foot intervals and will be the same color as the stucco.

A blade sign is shown along the decorative fin on the side of the building facing York Road, but the architect said he would be fine if the sign was located elsewhere.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Ms. Priscilla Carroll of Bowie and Jensen, LLC, Attorneys at Law represented Mr. Collin Back, a resident of West Towson. She referenced a letter that had been sent to express Mr. Back's concerns, which she also enumerated at the meeting. She stated that in the DRP's and the Zoning Commissioner's consideration of the SunTrust bank project, the corner where the project is located was identified as an important gateway into downtown Towson. She said the design does not meet this goal, nor does it meet the goals of the Walkable Towson concepts. The first floor is primarily garage walls and the sidewalks are narrow. There is a lack of public open space. The design of the building lacks compatibility in design and finishes.

**DESIGN REVIEW PANEL COMMENTS:**

Mr. Martin stated that he was not in favor of the blade sign, preferring that the signage be on the vertical element of the building.

Mr. Hord noted that this was a challenging site, but that he had a number of issues. He was concerned that the painted stucco would fade and chip over time. He was also concerned about the visual pattern the joints would create if they were not designed to line up with other features of the façade. He thought the elevations needed more study to avoid looking "cartoonish." He was also concerned about walkability, noting that Washington Avenue was the nicest street, but is interrupted by the garage and bank driveways. He advised using one entry, if possible. He also noted that the 10-foot wide dog park was not a great amenity. He concluded that these items needed more study.

Mr. Kellman said that the design meets county's Amenity Open Space regulations, and that the developer should be commended for including the rooftop amenity, even though it is not required. He noted the design is an improvement over what is existing, which is a parking lot.

Ms. Moser expressed agreement with Mr. Hord on the streetscape. She noted the entrance on Joppa Road is dark and uninviting, saying that much of the façade is blank, garage walls. She was concerned about the safety of the dog park, since it was hidden from public view. Mr. Moriak responded that the dog park was visible from the units above.

Mr. Hord was concerned about the long corridor looking onto the parking lot of the bank. Ms. Moser wondered why the main entrance was not on York Road, closer to the Towson core, and questioned whether this site has gateway significance. Mr. Karceski noted the site was not listed as a gateway in the Towson Community Plan, and that the bank occupying the corner was the gateway. He also said that the entry on Washington Avenue had more visibility than York Road and made a better connection to the downtown core.

Ms. Moser asked if the trees along W. Joppa could be taller, but was told due to the presence of overhead powerlines, the developer is showing smaller crape myrtles.

Mr. DiMenna inquired about exterior fire walls and the location of the dumpsters. He noted that the site was on the edge of the downtown core, that all buildings have back doors, and the site has limited street access. In his opinion, the lobby entrance was probably in the best location. He was, however, concerned about the maintenance of the stucco and stressed the need for durable materials.

Mr. Martin asked for more details on the Hearing Officers Hearing situation. Mr. Karceski responded that the HOH had gone for a full day, and then the Hearing Officer stated that his reading of the Code required the plan to be reviewed by the DRP. He later reversed his opinion, but in the interim, the council resolution was passed, requiring the residential developments to be reviewed by the DRP. Mr. Karceski noted that the rules of the game were changed midway, but that the developer was trying to accommodate this.

Mr. Karceski added that the bank has control of their own access on Washington Avenue and won't allow sharing of entrances as Mr. Hord had suggested earlier. He also said that the property meets the Towson Plan and the Walkable Towson Plan and adds more residential to the downtown core.

Mr. Hord said that he doubts the lobby on Washington would be used because it has no views of anything appealing, and that the building entrance should be better connected to activities, and not become a dead zone.

Mr. Tschiderer, the property owner, asked to address the panel. He said he appreciated the panel's comments, but he was confident that the project will be successful. He said the project has been well-thought out, the design was appropriate, and would be a unique standout in the local market. He stressed that Federal Realty was a highly experienced company that is making a significant investment in Towson. As the company is a long term holder of projects, they will reinvest as needed. In terms of the building materials, he stated that they are an industry standard commonly used on other buildings, including its own, and they will repaint in 10 years if needed. Given the time delays due to the changed regulations, Mr. Tschiderer expressed concern about spending too much more time on studying the design.

As the DRP members discussed what items to include in a potential motion, it was concluded that the main issues were with the facades, rather than the site design. The panel considered allowing staff to review revised elevations, but noted it would be advisable for the applicant to come back to the panel since they have the architectural expertise. Mr. Hord summed up the discussion, saying that the panel had reached consensus on approving the site plan and planting, but wanted to see the elevations refined to consider more brick, especially on the Washington and York Road facades, and if using stucco, show design details for the joints. Ms. Moser added she would like to see more lightness on the York Road elevation along with a more inviting definition of the entry.

#### **DISPOSITION:**

Mr. Hord moved that the Design Review Panel approve the site plan and layout. The panel requested that the applicant return to the Panel in the future for further review regarding the elevations. It was suggested that the applicants modify the elevations using more brick on the base and paying particular attention to the Washington and York Road facades. The revised elevations should address the following:

1. The use of painted plaster
2. Better integrations of control joints with other design elements
3. Incorporate more brick instead of plaster at building entries
4. Incorporate more brick into the facades

Ms. Moser seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved at 7:30 p.m.

**Code Statement:** Section 32 – 4 – 203 (i) (2) of the Baltimore County Code states, *The Panel's recommendation is binding on the Hearing Officer, and on the agencies under subsection (l), (Directors of the Department of Planning, the Department of Permits, Approvals and Inspections and the Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability), unless the Hearing Officer or agencies find that the Panel's actions constitute an abuse of its discretion or are unsupported by the documentation and evidence presented.*

Approved as of May 13, 2015