

AGENDA # 9

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: July 1, 2020

TITLE: 8355 Mansion Hill Avenue – Residential Building Complex. 1st Ald. Dist. (60816)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Janine Glaeser, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: July 1, 2020

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Tom DeChant, Lois Braun-Oddo, Christian Harper, Craig Weisensel, Rafeeq Asad, Syed Abbas and Shane Bernau.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of July 1, 2020, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** of a Residential Building Complex located at 8355 Mansion Hill Avenue. Registered and speaking in support were

McCaigue noted the site has 70-feet of grade change from end to end, which necessitates significant retaining walls. They are trying to create a sense of place and street environment. The floor plans remain the same for all residential buildings with a variation in color scheme. He shared slides of existing developments they've done as examples. The Commission had previously commented on architectural variance; materials include fiber cement siding, board and batten, masonry, reveals in both header details and spandrel details where the windows are set back. The site is interconnected to the public for pedestrians. From all angles you'll experience a similar but different view. The change in elevation and architecture creates a good sense of place.

The Commission discussed the following:

- With the large amount of retaining walls being used, aesthetically I don't care for the color or product you're showing. For example something like Ready Rock offers a much larger interlocking unit with the size and scale of these walls that larger module might look better. They offer nice neutral color e that don't have a lot of pattern to them like you're showing. More importantly, I'm struggling to see a slab on grade product fitting on this site with how much grade change there is and the expanse of retaining walls, it seems better suited to have buildings with exposed basements or something that integrates more with the topography. There is rigidity to site plan. I do like how you've integrated stormwater as pockets into the development. You could still improve the shape of some of those to be less engineered and more a natural amenity to the community.
- Is there a landscape way to minimize the exposure of some of these retaining walls? Minimize it with some plantings? More of an effort to do that, more substantial green areas in front of the retaining walls. It's not very attractive.

- I'd be curious to know at what point you have to put in a barrier wall if there is drop off of parking. Don't want a cable barrier. I don't know at what point a curb is enough. The long expanse of the retaining wall as it's near the amenities building, can there be more visual interest in the design to break up those elevations, whether it's different materials or colors, get more design element to it. Coming up from Pleasant View, that's a vehicular corridor with minimal pedestrian traffic. There was comment about adding diversity to the buildings in the design, additionally I'm concerned you added too much design elements to some of the elevations. The original had more simplicity and elegance, adding the gables and other things might now be going towards the overdone portion.
- If the right selections are made for landscaping that would break it up. There is no attempt to address breaking up those walls from the top side down with plants that would naturally grow and drape over the top. Some of that could be accomplished with trailing annuals. A combination of the right vining plants coming up from the bottom, trailing coming from the top, and in the bases, deciduous plants and evergreen trees that would break up the continuity in the long views. I have trouble getting past the retaining walls to look at the buildings, they dominate everything about this project. I'd like to see more detail on infiltration ponds, standing water ponds and what plans are for vegetation around those too.
- Break up the walls with greenery.
- Is there a way, initial is about envelope and the structure? Not the landscape, which is a big deal here. Is there a way to keep this moving based on the architecture and deal with the site stuff kind of like we did with the mural? Or does it need to be all in one?
- With initial approval we accept the mass and scale of the entire development, scale and buildings. It would mean we're accepting the terracing, the retaining walls and how the buildings relate to the site.
- I don't think the terracing is a bad concept I just don't think it's executed the way it could be. It has to be designed right to where it complements the site and not necessarily just brick walls. I think increasing the plant material against the wall it could be more successful.
- That would be a matter of the motion but initial you're accepting the slab on grade product with terracing and walls shown as is.
- Shane: I'm still not comfortable with the general site plan and initial approval would indicate acceptance of that. I'm not convinced that this is the right product, the right use of the product, I don't think it embraces the positive components and benefits of having that much grade change on a very unique site.
- I understand the challenges of the solution, let's talk about what referral would mean. Maybe there are other viable solutions than what they put together? Understand the complexities of the retaining wall. Other alternative solutions might not be possible or it might not significantly change the outcomes. We need to tell them what changes we'd want to see.
- If the slab on grade is not the right product do we have to feel compelled to approve a project that's based on that? There's beautiful hillsides built with lovely developments all over. Are we limiting ourselves in thinking this has to be a slab on grade product? Hypothetically even additional terracing and landscaping, these can have pretty major trickle down effects on the site plan. If there's enough change to the site plan I'd want to see another iteration before providing initial approval.
- If the location of the retaining wall in relation to the drive aisle and parking is irreversible with initial approval I think we do a referral.
- This is a reflection of there being a slab on grade and no opportunity to have anything in a lower level to terrace down.
- I feel like it's a missed opportunity to not let them respond to so many major comments, especially in terms of reconfiguring the site plan.
- I urge Commissioners to picture a different project typology where some of that parking is integrated into the building as underground parking and what that could do. There's a lot of pavement, 90 degree parking, if you could free that up by reducing the capacity of on-site parking you could have more

streetscape type spaces outside of the buildings and that dramatically changes the project feel, aesthetic and site plan. There's opportunity to improve the site plan over what we're seeing today.

- Ignore the architecture comment, there's no mandate that they have to simplify since no one else commented on the architecture.

Applicant:

The terracing is being lost. We've terraced and added landscape to these walls, the intent of what Tom was describing. It's a tiered wall with a planting bed in between. Each of those is shown in a scaled context. It's not just a singular wall in all circumstances. The monumental stair in the center, it was intentional to break that down to human scale. We wouldn't go with ivy due to liability but we had significant discussions on species. For the guardrail we are proposing a decorative fence that will have lateral stability on that side of the wall with the aesthetic of a full fence, 48 or 54 inches determined by code. We're open to specific suggestions of overdoing architecture, if there is something specific we're happy to pull some of those off. We did it in as light a manner as we could knowing they're the same building types. The product type below grade, any private housing development that goes on this will have the same exact challenges. The only different is going to be it would all be consolidated in certain areas. We're abiding by the neighborhood plan, that change in grade is what's dictating the terrace. It's not something that would go away entirely with a different product type. It's a significant cost to us but we feel it actually improves it, we feel this more amenitizes it.

ACTION:

A motion was made by Bernau, seconded by Asad, to **REFER**. The motion failed on a roll call vote of (4-4) with Asad, Bernau, Harper and Goodhart voting yes; Weisensel, Braun-Oddo, DeChant and Abbas voting o.

On a motion by DeChant, seconded by Weisensel, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion passed on a roll call vote of (5-2) with Asad, Weisensel, Braun-Oddo, DeChant and Abbas voting yes; Bernau and Harper voting no.

The motion provide for the following:

- More elevations or perspectives of a length of the retaining walls showing the tiering and additional full blown landscape plans with species identified for the retaining walls.