



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

STAFF PRESENT

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*
LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*
ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

MEMBERS PRESENT

JULIE BRADY
DEBORAH FENNICK
JAMES KIRYLO
MATTHEW RICE
FRANK VALDES

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, September 8, 2011, 6:30 p.m.** in the Central Library, 1st Floor Conference Room, 79 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

The purpose of the meeting was to review and make recommendations on the following proposals:

70 Inner Belt Road (Case #ZBA 2007-63-R2-8/2011)

Review of changes since the last DRC meeting where the Applicant presented.

Description: Applicant and Owner CoreSite Real Estate 70 Inner Belt, LLC seek a revision to Special Permit with Site Plan Review (SPSR) (ZBA2007-63) under SZO §5.3.8 in order to substantially renovate the building façade. The original SPSR was for the expansion of an existing 22,667 sf data storage use (§7.11.15.1.c) within the second floor of an existing building for a total of 61,436 s.f. Prior revisions include ZBA 2007-63-R0308 and ZBA 2007-63-R0808 which consisted of increasing the use by approx 141,000 sf and altering the site. IA zone. Ward 1.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: September 21, 2011

This was the second time this case had come before the DRC. The Applicant was attempting to respond to the comments that were made at the last DRC meeting which were that the originally proposed design was too monotone. The Applicant is proposing to re clad the building along the two most prominent locations, but the entire building would be treated on all sides. They are introducing more vertical elements to the façade as well as elements around the existing windows. The biggest change is the move away from the flat metal look on the façade with the implementation of vertically striated panels.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.



- There were some existing, inlay, painted CMU panels. What will happen with those? – (r) We are looking to keep those as painted areas but we will be going over the panels and repainting the CMU so that it matches the color scheme of the building better. The metal panels will start where the masonry ends.
- How old is the building? (r) It was constructed in the late 1960's.
- What is the condition of the mortar on the building? – (r) It is in good shape.

Option C is subtle, but it is about the right move in terms of adding the proper amount of differentiation in terms of adding windows but keeping a cohesive look to the façade.

Adding the different vertical pattern is successful. The new design makes the gray color richer and the brick helps to ground the building.

The brick is a different color in the renderings than in the picture. Perhaps you could power wash the brick to help lighten it up.

Assembly Square PUD – Blocks 1 and 4

Review of changes since the last DRC meeting where the Applicant presented.

Description: Applicant Avalon Bay's proposal to construct two mixed-use building in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District. ASMD zone. Ward 1.

SPGA: Planning Board

Hearing Date: TBD

This was the second time the project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant was responding to comments made by the DRC at their previous meeting. In Block 1, the Applicant proposed an architectural style that is more reflective of a traditional way of building. There was an attempt to create rhythm, as well as depth, through the use of balconies so that the facades of the building do not appear flat. The materials of the Block 1 building were intended to be more traditional and all facades would have retail bases with residential tops. Block 4 would have facades that are embraced but with areas that are pushed back to create relief. The facades on this building would have a much more plain quality and the percentage of void to solid would be much higher than on that of Block 1. The Block 4 building is designed to have more of a collage quality and there would also be a retail base with residential units above.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- On the west elevation of Block 1, there appears to be different brick colors on different parts of the façade. Is this correct in the rendering? – (r) Yes, that is correct. The bricks are different colors and textures on different parts of the facades. There are some bricks, that will be a standard red brick and there are others, such as those on the parking garage, which would be more of a flashed brick.
- How many of the apartments will have balconies and what will be the size of balconies in Block 1? – (r) All of the units on the north façade that face the river will have balconies. Two of every six or eight units that face the interior courtyard will get a balcony and the remaining units will have Juliet balconies, which do not have any actual outdoor space. The balconies will be 8 to 10 feet wide and 5 feet deep and therefore will have between 40 and 50 square feet of outdoor space.



- You said there were internal conversations about the balconies on Block 1. Do you like the balconies? – (r) Yes, it gives the buildings a domestic residential feeling, gives shadow play, and allows residents to take in the view. I do not think residents will be allowed to use the balconies as bike storage.
- What materials will the balconies in Block 1 be constructed out of? – (r) They will be made out of aluminum railings with a painted mat color to resemble a cast iron. Other than that, we have not gotten into the details too much for their construction.
- Perhaps there is a way to further break up the horizontal rhythm that still exists in Block 1 by using some different type of material besides brick? – (r) Perhaps the metal support pieces could be more numerous to help break up that horizontal rhythm. I agree that a material change could help to break up this horizontal prominence and I think the authors of the design guidelines would endorse this. I also think that the color of the horizontal elements in the rendering over accentuates the horizontal banding on the façade.
- Where will the wood cladding be used in Block 4? – (r) The wood cladding would be used in very limited instances at each of the townhouses, but very sporadically. It would generally be equated with the residential component of Block 4.
- Can you please explain what “AVA” is? Is this the Avalon Bay logo and, if so, what does it indicate? – (r) The residential units in Block 4 are a branded product that we designed to target to a specific demographic. We are trying to differentiate these units, or products, from traditional Avalon Bay products and “AVA” is the name we came up with.
- Are there elements in the design of Block 4 that come to the ground and limit the flexibility of the retail design on the ground level? – (r) Block 4 is pretty open and there are not many elements from the upper stories that come all the way to the ground. However, in Block 1 there are more elements that do come all the way down to the first floor.
- Will the mechanical equipment all be enclosed inside each of the buildings? – (r) The residential mechanical equipment will be located on the roof of each building and most of the retail mechanical equipment will be inside each of the retail units with louvers. The mechanical equipment on the roof will all be kept back from the edges of the building so it cannot be seen from the street. There will be approximately 125 condenser farms over 60,000 square feet of roof.
- What kind of initiatives have you adopted for sustainability for each of the buildings? Are you seeking LEED certification? – (r) All of the mechanical units are very efficient, we are committed to the interior air quality standards, we will use locally sourced materials where possible, and setback thermostats will also be implemented. We are planning as much as possible to recycle construction waste, to use green materials, and to be as sustainable as possible. We are looking into LEED certification and we are doing this for each of the units, but this may not be possible for the entire building because Federal Realty does not want to limit the type of retail tenants that would be permitted to locate on the first floor. We are looking at Energy Star certification as well and we are in favor of resource efficient components.

Block 1

The horizontal rhythm is still very strong and evident. It becomes almost a big void in the façade. The vertical elements need to do a better job of breaking up this rhythm and perhaps some type of material change could accomplish this. A panel system or something similar could be put in place to accomplish this, but it should not go so far as to make the area where the garage is located to appear residential. A screen or panel material would work well here also, but it should be something more opaque as opposed to transparent.



The neo-classical element overlooking the public space on the east elevation is still troubling. The archways just seem so foreign to the remainder of the building. They almost do not seem to belong there at all, but perhaps simply squaring those vertical elements off at the top could work well there.

The sloped glass canopy that comes out in the front seems strange in terms of how it terminates from one tower to the next. The design of the project seems awkward in that location. The shed/awning type roof of the glass is not necessarily appropriate in this part of the design. This should be the subject of some examination moving forward in the final design and construction of the building. A trellis-like pitch or something more shallow could work better in this area.

The design of the building achieves what it needs to do urbanistically, with the exception of the east elevation. The techniques used on this façade could make it something special and this façade should relate back to the towers and the other elements of the rest of the block.

To articulate the cornices differently, a pre patina copper is a very elegant accent element that could be worked into the design to really bring the materials of the building together.

The façade should read as separate components but perhaps not so dramatically or aggressively.

What this building looks like at the northeast corner also needs to be considered when formulating the final building design.

Block 4

There seems to be something plastic about the look of the retail elements when you look at the façade moving down Main Street. There should be something on the façade that maintains the plane of the upper stories down to the ground level. There could be a much more tidy or resolved transition between the upper residential stories and the commercial units on the ground floor.

Perhaps a different material or element could be used to separate the retail base and the upper floor residential portion from one another. This would give the façade flexibility at the bottom level and allow there to be more done with the individual design of the retail facades. This would not have to happen everywhere on the facades but should be used strategically in enough places where a horizontal line could be established.

While the color palette is appreciated, there is concern that it is too dark and that the renderings are optimistically rendered lighter. The large amount of glass on the façade will read as a dark color for most of the day. The light mullions will bring light to the space but there is concern that the facades will appear even flatter with less light. Perhaps there is an opportunity to introduce white or lighter colored mullions into the design.

It would be good to stick with a more modular brick for the design of the building.

Assembly Square PUD – Block 3

Description: Review of proposal to construct a mixed-use building including retail and a cinema in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District. ASMD zone. Ward 1.

SPGA: Planning Board

Hearing Date: TBD



This was the first time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant is proposing to construct a mixed-use building with retail on the first two floors, a stadium seating cineplex on the upper most floor, and associated parking. This would be a completely commercial building. To eliminate having a massive, 40 foot, squared off box at the top of the building, the design pushes and pulls out various spaces and cuts openings into the box to make space for accessory uses to the theater space. The corner of the building will be wrapped with signage for the cinema so that it has visibility onto Main Street.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- Why are we seeing this if it is all going to change? You seem to be on the right track for making the appropriate modifications based on your observations, but we might rather wait for you to make those changes before we provide our input. – (r) We would appreciate any feedback at all that you could give us at this point to keep us moving in the right direction. We realize that this is somewhat of a work in progress and we already have changes in mind that we would like to make, but any feedback you can provide on this proposed design would be welcomed.
- Does the retail on the second level have an independent staircase? – (r) A tenant on the second level would be accessed through the main lobby or possibly through one of the smaller retail spaces.

The building has a very complicated programming with parking, the cinema, and the retail all together. The lighting that is planned for the building needs to consider the programming of the building. The design of the building is not really coming together cohesively at this point. A lot of the elements of the design do not tie into one another entirely and this should be occurring. There are many interesting elements to this building but they are not working together.

There seems to be two distinct types of design elements here that have not resolved themselves and they are not working together with regard to the design of the building. Is the building trying to be modern or traditional? It seems that this block should be more of a contemporary building.

The building is too diagrammatic in terms of the programming and in terms of the materials. The garage reads as the pre-cast, the cinema reads as the metal panel, and the retail reads as the brick base. These elements need to tie into one another better. Perhaps using vertical elements and glass, such as what you are proposing for the cinema entrance, to help fit everything together would be more successful.

The flat metal panels on the cinema façade and the connection between the retail floors and cinema mass need to be further refined. There are more successful ways to incorporate the corrugated metal into the design.

A design that is less traditional would be better and we think it can be done without the use of brick. Perhaps there is a way to thread through the corrugated metal to the ground or to bring some other upper element down to the first floor.

The trellis/ pergola element seems somewhat out of place and seems like it is just stuck randomly into the design.

We would like to see a perspective view of the proposal to understand how all of the pieces of the building connect with one another and how the building will be viewed from the surrounding area.

