

Minutes of Carlyle/Eisenhower East Design Review Board (DRB) Meeting

June 11, 2025, 7:30 pm

Alexandria City Hall – Sister Cities Conference Room

Board Members in Attendance:

Chair: Eric Colbert

Vice Chair: Tom Canfield

Charles Paul

Siti Abdul-Rahman

City Staff:

Nathan Randall, P&Z

Leon Vignes, P&Z

Alexa Powell, P&Z

Julian Swierczek, P&Z

Luke Cowan, P&Z

Applicants In Attendance:

Ken Wire, Wire – Gill, attorney

Megan Rappolt, Wire – Gill, attorney

Adam Peters, Red Fox Development

Steve Smith, Cooper Carry Architects

Sam Guenin, Cooper Carry Architects

Alysha Buck, Cooper Carry Architects

Citizens In Attendance (from sign-in sheet):

Charles Melton, Resident of Carlyle Towers

Ashley Lyons, Resident of Carlyle Towers

Julie Altobelli, Resident of Carlyle Towers

Jo Mae Michael, Resident of Carlyle Towers

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order/Introductions

Eric Colbert, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:31pm.

4. Adoption of the April 10, 2025 Meeting Minutes of the DRB

The Board considered Agenda Item #4 out of order. On a motion made by Charles Paul and seconded by Vice Chair Canfield, the vote was unanimous in favor of adopting the minutes of the April 10, 2025, meeting.

2. Eisenhower East Block 3 (2425 Mill Road)

Nathan Randall introduced Julian Swierczek, who outlined the Staff Memo for this meeting and gave a brief overview of the project.

The Board was given a general overview of the project, as well as a reminder of the previous meetings proceedings and subsequent Action Report. Both were presented by Julian Swierczek, an Urban Planner with the Department of Planning & Zoning. This was then followed by a presentation from the primary project architect Steve Smith. This presentation covered the overall design of the tower, highlighting in particular the changes made that the development team felt met the recommendations that the Board provided at their previous April 10 meeting.

The development team emphasized that they were seeking a vote on the project from the board during the meeting, without the need to return to any future meetings prior to Planning Commission and City Council consideration. In response to this, Board member Charles Paul asked staff what the options might be for the board, should they not feel ready to vote on the project. After staff advised various options, Mr. Paul expressed that he had reservations, but thought the building would be a benefit to the neighborhood and would be consistent with other nearby buildings. He also said that he would rather take a vote on the project that night than potentially delay or halt it. Board member Ms. Siti Abdul-Rahman however expressed that she struggled to see what changes were actually implemented by the applicant since their previous submission, and that she consequently feels that the applicant has not heeded the advice of the Board. Given the prominence of this project however, Ms. Abdul-Rahman felt that gave her pause on voting. Chairman Eric Colbert echoed these sentiments and similarly expressed his concern that the guidance of the Board was not acknowledged, and he consequently had reservations about the building design still, noting that the forms of the tower still seemed too complicated. Vice Chair Canfield also expressed concern about the building being excessively complex and lacking clarity in aspects of its design, including the façade/skin and certain building forms. Other outstanding items identified by the Board included the provision of the horizontal break in the building façade, the garage screening, and the design at the pedestrian level. Mr. Canfield also noted that that the Board would typically be presented with greater detail about certain building elements at this stage of review, such as, in this case, a sample of the “perforated metal” proposed for the garage screening.

At the suggestion of the applicant, the Board recommended that the applicant bring the project back to the DRB after coordinating with Planning Staff to resolve the outstanding items and achieve a stronger consensus on the building design. The applicant would present their revised submission at a later DRB meeting date, with the understanding that this project would still be considered at public hearings by the end of 2025. The Board offered that the applicant should use the previous list of outstanding items from the April 10 meeting as guidance for these meeting session with Planning Staff. This list included the following seven items:

1. A flexible approach toward implementing the garage screening requirements would involve only the following sections of façade adhering to the screening recommendations of a “B Street” in the EESAP:

- The eastern half of Pershing Avenue (south façade)
 - All of Stovall Street (east façade)
 - The eastern half of Mill Road (north façade)
2. The above noted sections of garage screening façade would still need to comply with the EESAP recommendation of being “indistinguishable from occupied space.” The Board was uncertain that the currently proposed metal panels and lighting scheme would meet this standard and consequently provided several examples of glass with ventilation as alternatives. The applicant should provide further details of the planned garage screening elements and/or look to revise these sections of the façade to be glass.
 3. Revise building design to adhere to the recommendation for an “architecturally significant” feature at the southwest corner of the building site at the intersection of Pershing Avenue and Telegraph Road. Specifically, the Board has recommended that the design team look at the stairwell at this location and explore ways to enhance it architecturally.
 4. The design of the tower façade seemed to the Board to be somewhat complicated, with particularly regarding the “zipper” element of the tower design. This break in the façade elements seems to work well when done vertically but reduces the vertical impact of the tower when implemented horizontally. The applicant should therefore look at ways to minimizing the horizontal breaks in the façade, particularly at the midpoint of the tower.
 5. The Board recommended that the applicant explore revising the spacing between the pre-cast elements on the tower portion of the façade to provide further cohesion in overall composition.
 6. Relative to the scale of the building height and massing, there seems to be too many façade elements overall. Look to simplify the “skin” of the building, as well as enhance the verticality of the building design. Possible ways of doing this would be to change the ratio of metal vs. pre-cast panels, or by making the metal panel sections feel more vertical.
 7. Explore alternate formats to the currently proposed building slab as relates to the ground floor retail. As shown, the slab includes a “fold” to accommodate the significant slope along the Stovall Street frontage of the site. While this may be sufficient for a single, larger tenant, the Board is concerned that this will restrict flexibility with the retail space in the future to accommodate a potential need for multiple tenants along Stovall Street.

3. Carlyle Block B (2051 Jamieson)

Nathan Randall introduced Alexa Powell who gave a synopsis of the Staff Memo and a brief overview of the project.

The Board generally supported the conversion and added density, acknowledging market/economic factors in the applicant’s proposal. The Board encouraged the developer to refine minor design elements and plan set illustrations in collaboration with City staff. Neighborhood residents voiced concerns about whether the changes to the color of the building would fit in with

the neighborhood character of the Carlyle area, which is primarily red brick, but the DRB acknowledged they had limited purview on this issue given the applicable standards for Block B. Finally, the Board asked for continued collaboration between the applicant and staff as the design is further refined to address some minor elements identified below.

Alexa Powell, Planning & Zoning staff, began with a brief overview of the project. She explained that, as requested, the applicant provided a color study with illustrations of the additional floors in Silverdove, charcoal, and black. Ms. Powell noted that overall, the proposal remained largely unchanged, preserving the architectural integrity of the existing six-story structure, incorporating subtle exterior modifications. Ms. Powell reminded the Board that previous discussions about venting locations for dryers, kitchens, and bathrooms would be revisited before the Final Site Plan submission, when material boards are provided. She also noted the Board had received a letter from a Carlyle Towers resident representing several neighbors, outlining concerns and questions.

Tom Canfield, Vice Chair, asked staff, in response to the recent letter, to go into a little more detail about which aspects were governed by the Carlyle Design Guidelines which the board has purview over and which items were not subject to Design Review Board (DRB) review.

Nathan Randall, Planning & Zoning staff, responded by outlining the broader development review process to distinguish between DRB-reviewed design elements and issues addressed through the overall development review process (which culminates with public hearings at Planning Commission and City Council.) He clarified that the DRB has authority over architectural issues such as design compatibility, comparative height, and bulk. Issues like traffic, floor area ratio (FAR), overall height, and economic impact fall outside the Board's scope. Mr. Randall also addressed questions about red brick requirements, confirming that while brick is common in Carlyle, there is no regulation mandating its use or prohibiting painted facades.

Charles Paul, Board member, asked a follow-up question about the difference in standards between the Carlyle neighborhood and Eisenhower East. Mr. Randall shared that the Carlyle neighborhood was governed by an SUP which at the time of its creation focused on more zoning related elements and the review criteria for Eisenhower East are more comprehensive and speak to specific design standards.

Attorney Ken Wire, representing the applicant, explained that the office-to-residential conversion responds to office market softness and long-term vacancy. He shared that the need to expand the structure was to achieve operational efficiency and achieve specific investment targets. He emphasized that conversions are city-supported as they strengthen the tax base, noting that occupied residential buildings generate more tax revenue than vacant office space. Mr. Wire acknowledged neighboring residents' concerns and affirmed that the applicant is proposing a bigger building that may block views.

Steven Smith, architect for the applicant, provided a brief overview of the project which is proposed for adaptive reuse and vertical expansion into residential units. He outlined the design, which aims to add four stories and reach approximately 200 units (190,000 sq. ft.), the minimum for economic feasibility. He highlighted challenges common to conversions — such as deeper floorplates — and shared that the addition was designed to reduce visual impact by setting back

the upper stories and matching floor heights to the existing structure. He also described how the first new floor being added would serve as a transition by mimicking the brick aesthetic of the existing structure and then setting back the remaining three floors to reduce visual impact from neighboring buildings. He also shared that two factors were ultimately driving the decision to propose painting the building white the first being trying to match the existing brick for the first additional story being nearly impossible and also from a branding standpoint the goal was to distinguish it from surrounding properties and attract renters. Several color options (charcoal, light gray, darker tones) were presented for the top addition.

Mr. Smith affirmed that this project may block some views as a result of the height of the addition but that their team had done everything possible to minimize the height increase to achieve the unit count needed for the project to meet the developers standards for investing in the project. He added that the addition mimicked the floor-to-floor spacing of the existing building to maintain that proportion as you move up the building providing. The 13.5 foot floor-to-floor provided allows for mechanical equipment and 9-foot ceilings on each additional floor except for the top floor which measures 15 feet to allow for 10-foot ceilings. He also addressed criticisms regarding the renderings, noting the addition includes a 6-foot plenum between floors to accommodate pool equipment and necessary support structure, and a 15-foot mechanical penthouse is required for the elevator overrun. An error was found in the massing context section as it relates to labeling of height which the applicant indicated they would fix. He further explained that the setbacks provided and the L-shape would screen the rooftop pool area from view of Carlyle Towers residents concerned about pool area lighting and visibility of these common areas.

The hearing was then opened for public comment and feedback.

Carol Lyons, Carlyle Towers resident, expressed some concerns related to traffic capacity along Englehardt Lane as it is the access point for their garage, bulk of the proposed addition, and maintaining the character of the existing neighborhood as a transition area between Old Town and the more modern Eisenhower East. In addition, she expressed a desire for certain sheets in the plan set to provide accurate color representations of the traditional red brick on the surrounding buildings to demonstrate that painting the brick white as proposed would be incompatible with the neighborhood.

Julie Altobelli and Charles Melton, Carlyle Towers residents, expressed concern about losing their views due to the proposed height increase, which they believe could affect their property values.

Several community members and DRB members questioned the white paint and noted that the renderings grayed out surrounding red brick buildings, which some found misleading. Other concerns were also raised about blocked views, the building's increased height and bulk, rooftop pool lighting, and whether the proposed changes respected the neighborhood's character.

Charles Paul, DRB Member, acknowledged some of these concerns, like overall height, indicating that they were more appropriately addressed by Planning Commission and City Council. He pointed out that painting brick is not prohibited under Carlyle's Design guidelines and felt that the Board should not base its decision on this element. He also noted that increasing the residential population might help address nearby retail vacancies by boosting foot traffic.

Overall, the Board discussed the color study indicating a preference for the lighter, Gray Dove, top; but did suggest more color studies to look at ways to retain the existing red brick on the lower half of the building. They also encouraged the applicant to improve the accuracy of the rendering by placing it in context with the surrounding brick buildings and depicting the setbacks from surrounding buildings with more fidelity. The last point of discussion was on the aesthetics of the top floors to work with staff on achieving more balance in terms of the solid to glass.

The Carlyle-Eisenhower East Design Review Board (DRB) recommended that the applicant should work with staff to make some refinements to the application, including:

- a. Selection of the lighter (Dove Gray), as it is the DRB's preference based on the color study provided.
- b. Providing some additional context on Sheet A4-10, improving renderings of the proposed building, to demonstrate how the building will look in its surroundings.
- c. Providing a separate illustration/study depicting the following items:
 - i. Wider mullions to achieve a higher proportion of metal panel to glass on the top three floors.
 - ii. An additional color study that would retain the existing red brick and use a second façade color shared across the new upper floors and the portion of the existing building above the main entrance.

The Board otherwise endorsed the plan and did not need to review the project further prior to Final Site Plan. The also encouraged continued collaboration between the applicant and staff as the design is further refined.

5. Other Business

There was no other business to discuss.

6. Public Comment

There were no members of the public present.

7. Motion to Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by Charles Paul and seconded by Tom Canfield, and the vote was unanimous in favor of adjournment. Meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:20 pm.