Hoffman Block 2 – TSA: Design Evaluation Comments

2/11/2015

The following is a list of Staff comments concerning the latest DRB submission materials, received on 2/10/15. Positive strides have continued to be made finding ways to break up the building's uniformity, establish a clear building base vocabulary, and addressing the open space. Critically, Staff believes that the design has not yet achieved the important goal of creating a distinctive tower top, a principle that has been communicated clearly and for which alternative studies are required going forward.

Note: The principles in bold text remained unchanged from Staff's 1/7/15 comments; the items within the principles (a., b., etc.) have been modified to reflect the latest submission that is being reviewed by DRB

Staff offers the following comments to further guide the evolution of this building's design:

1. **Forms: The building mass should be articulated, employ predominantly vertical expression, and create an active skyline through varied heights, with a distinctive or articulated tower top.**

    a. Vertical Expression: The placement of red vertical elements in front of horizontal elements is a positive move, esp. given the varied lengths of select vertical elements on the front façade. However, the resolution of vertical and horizontal rhythms at the building top(s) is not yet clearly resolved. The desire to have the alternate strong horizontals offset between the light and dark facades is effective, but has now created a logic issue where these two skins meet the sky: as closely related as these two fabrics are, it seems both visually and logically confusing to have one end in a 2-story element, while the other one ends in either a 3-story element, or a 1-story one. Both of these skins also need to find a way to better address their terminal floors: the important juncture between building and sky remains unresolved and is a missed opportunity to lighten the still heavy expression of these volumes.

    b. Varied Heights: Although different heights are proposed for each volume, the lack of a clearly articulated top features in combination with the blocky cube form of each volume detracts from the intended variation. Explore visually reducing one floor on the white volume by incorporating that space into the red volume behind. This might permit visually expanding one floor on the red volume while also achieving greater height variation.

c. Articulated Top: As noted earlier, Staff remains concerned with the lack of distinction at the building's top, especially since this principle has been articulated clearly, and is also a city design principle that is raised strongly and repeatedly by City Council. The proposed design remains blocky and overly simple, and this issue must be addressed going forward.

2. Penthouse: The mechanical penthouse should be fully integrated into the building design, massing and materiality.

Screening: Staff reiterates the previous comments and urges further work to develop this as a distinct roofline. Per 1c., the Applicant should study options for achieving this clearly articulated goal of City Council.

3. Vocabulary: The building should address grade to sky relationships through thoughtful interpretation of base-middle-top vocabulary and strategies.

a. Skins: The skin-meets-sky solution, as stated above, is not yet successful. A common language for both related skins must be developed for this crucial location.

i. Breaks: The latest design's inclusion of wider vertical solids, notably on the corners and within the volumes, is a positive step, and should continue to be developed.

b. Base: The current proposal to shift the white volume's base lower is a successful move, helping to break up the uniformity at the ground level, and reinforce the varied heights, but as discussed above, has set up a new logic problem at the top which needs to be addressed.

4. Entry: The formal relationship between building and entry element(s) should be strong, legible, and consistent with the building parti (design concept).

a. Vestibule: The current proposal makes a bold step to announce the building's entry. The extension of the red language is supported; however, the current design appears to introduce another block form into the composition. Staff recommends the following:

i. Human-scale: Designing the vestibule to be more human-scaled;

ii. Canopy: Emphasizing a distinct canopy feature, possibly a lower floating plane of structural glass, which could eliminate the need for the upper glazing;

iii. Study the scale, color and method of integration of this form into the building as a whole.

iv. Glass: Adjusting the use of glass within the vestibule (see ii above).

b. Sidewalk Pattern: The Applicant has indicated that further study would be given to the approach's paving design; Staff concurs with this point.

c. Ramp: Staff believes that the ramp design has improved significantly and encourages further exploration of this element, since only basic forms have been presented.

d. Open Space: Staff believes that the envisioned open space on the site's southeast corner is headed in the right direction as a shaded urban plaza with a mix of landscaped and open areas. Staff encourages further development of this area, pending input from RPCA.

5. Security: Any required security measures should read as integral parts of the building and landscape design.

a. Staff affirms the direction illustrated and reiterates the previous comments: Staff supports the landscaped, walled security barrier concept. Fencing is not considered a viable alternative for the pedestrian-oriented areas of this urban site.

6. Parking: Above-grade parking garage facades shall be architecturally treated to be in harmony with the overall building and to screen interior light fixtures, pipes and raw concrete.

a. Staff affirms the direction illustrated and reiterates the previous comments: Staff believes the efforts to thematically link the parking garage to the main building are very positive, supporting both the selective red lighting and the echoing of the dark volume's materials in the garage design. Continued refinement of these concepts is encouraged.

b. Green Screen: Staff encourages the research and presentation of a variety of hearty plant materials that will sufficiently screen the garage where illustrated. Specifically, staff recommends the use of Virginia Creeper or similar native species/vines for this treatment.

Hoffman Block 2 – TSA: Design Evaluation Comments

2/4/2015

The following is a list of Staff comments concerning the latest DRB submission materials, received on 2/2/15. The Applicant continues to respond positively to many aspects of the principles listed in previous comments. Notably, the Applicant has refined the following: Distinct volumes; penthouse screening; and an exploration of the expanded use of colored elements to the lowest base and parking garage.

Note: The principles in bold text remained unchanged from Staff's 1/7/15 comments; the items within the principles (a., b., etc.) have been modified to reflect the latest submission that is being reviewed by DRB

Staff offers the following comments to further guide the evolution of this building's design:

1. **Forms: The building mass should be articulated, employ predominantly vertical expression, and create an active skyline through varied heights, with a distinctive or articulated tower top.**

   a. Vertical Expression: The red volume's vertical elements are interrupted by the horizontal elements, which renders the building's signature volume less vertical than desirable, and also downplays the drama that could be achieved by the randomness of these verticals. Study placing the vertical components in front of the horizontal components to make them dominant.

   b. Varied Heights: It is unclear whether City Council would approve the current roofline design, due to the fact that the proposed building reads as three flat-roofed cubes, abruptly terminating at the top. Further treatment of the rooflines is needed, especially for the red volume, to make these areas more visually interesting and distinct. The first level of treatment would involve addressing what happens to each skin typology as it approaches the sky – something that would create a subtle building "top" expression through variation in building skin, glazing, or other variable (see example, below). The second involves finding a way to give the red volume a strong and distinctive roof form, one that makes the skyline of this building a memorable landmark, while remaining integral to the design concepts.

2. **Penthouse: The mechanical penthouse should be fully integrated into the building design, massing and materiality.**

Screening: Staff believes the current screening proposal to carry the red framework up to the top of the penthouse is a positive step. In conjunction with 1b. (Varied Heights), however, further work is needed to develop this as a distinct roofline; applicant should study options for achieving this clearly articulated goal of City Council.

3. **Vocabulary: The building should address grade to sky relationships through thoughtful interpretation of base-middle-top vocabulary and strategies.**

   a. Skins: Staff supports the extension of the red skin to the lowest base and wrapping this skin around the northern façade;. Further information is needed concerning the skin details, such as detail drawings of the envisioned materials and/or components.

      i. Breaks: The uniformity of all three volumes' windows and vertical elements creates a repetitive façade that lacks sustained interest. Staff recommends studying the inclusion of wider vertical solids in strategically chosen locations to interrupt this repetition and balance the building forms..

   b. Base: The current proposal does not distinguish all building bases effectively. Specifically, staff recommends lowering the white (south) volume's base to reinforce the difference in heights of the major building elements, and also reflect the presence of the large sunken garden area. The current alignment of bases reinforces a horizontal approach, where verticality is desired.

4. **Entry: The formal relationship between building and entry element(s) should be strong, legible, and consistent with the building parti (design concept).**

   a. Approach: The roof extension demarcates the entryway more effectively, as does the location of the steps closer to the entry area (executed in the previous design submission). This, in conjunction with the extension of the red component to the lower base, has given more order to the intersection of the three building volumes at this juncture, but the entry element still appears additive, not organic.
   b. Color:

      i. Vestibule: The selective lighting of entry vestibule in red further ties the area together.

      ii. Base Volume: The coloring of the lower base volume in off-set reds is not supported by staff (Entry View drawing); this coloration should not be so distinct, esp. from the rest of the red volume.

iii. Sidewalk Pattern: In plan view, staff does not support the randomized red sidewalk tiles curving out of the main entry walkway and towards the SE plaza. Rather, staff recommends exploring simpler, geometric pattern to run directly from the main entry to Stovall St.

c. Ramp: Staff believes that the area between the walkway and the ADA access ramp would benefit from being opened up to the garden below. This would create the sense of the ramp being a bridge floating above the sloped landscape, and make the entire entry sequence more open, engaging and playful.Recognizing that the walkway is designated as an EVE, this option should be explored carefully.

d. Open Space: Staff reiterates the previous comments – further information must be provided and the thematic development clarified concerning the plaza area depicted on the site's southeast corner.

5. Security: Any required security measures should read as integral parts of the building and landscape design.

a. Staff supports the landscaped, walled security barrier concept. Fencing is not considered a viable alternative for the pedestrian-oriented areas of this urban site.

6. Parking: Above-grade parking garage facades shall be architecturally treated to be in harmony with the overall building and to screen interior light fixtures, pipes and raw concrete.

a. Staff believes the efforts to thematically link the parking garage to the main building are very positive, supporting both the selective red lighting and the echoing of the dark volume's materials in the garage design. Continued refinement of these concepts is encouraged.

Below is an example of a subtle articulation of a repetitive precast façade at the building top (the red precast portion, in the image below):

Hoffman Block 2 – TSA: Design Evaluation Comments

1/15/2015

The following is a list of Staff comments concerning the latest DRB submission materials, received on 1/14/15. The Applicant has responded positively to many aspects of the principles listed in the 1/7/15 comments. Notably, the Applicant has presented several options reflecting the following: More articulated massing; penthouse screening; a more evolved use of base-middle-top expression; and an exploration of the expanded use of colored elements.

Key:

Option 1 Front = 1-F; Option 1 Back = 1-B; Option 1 Roof = 1-R
Option 2 Front = 2-F, etc.
Option 3 Front = 3-F, etc.

South Skin = Lighter skin along Eisenhower Ave.
North Skin = Darker skin along Stovall St. & Pershing Ave.

Note: The principles in bold text remained unchanged from Staff's 1/7/15 comments; the items within the principles (a., b., etc.) have been modified to reflect the latest submission that is being reviewed by DRB

Staff offers the following comments to further guide the evolution of this building's design:

7. **Forms: The building mass should be articulated, employ predominantly vertical expression, and create an active skyline through varied heights, with a distinctive or articulated tower top.**

    a. Setback: On the south side, Staff favors the deeper setback as illustrated in 2-F and 3-F. On the building's west side, Staff believes a sharp corner is needed at the intersection of the North Skin and the red component; this is most effectively conveyed in 2-B and 2-R, where the North Skin projects out from the underlying building mass and slightly over the red component. This feature has the dual benefits of making the north portion of the building more vertical in proportion, and better expressing its parallelogram plan form.

8. **Penthouse: The mechanical penthouse should be fully integrated into the building design, massing and materiality.**

a. Screening: Staff supports extending the red component above the roof, but does not believe the current screening proposal is effective. The penthouse massing, though much improved, continues to read as a solid, highly visible mass on top of the building. Staff recommends the exploration of glass on all of - or at least the first level of - the penthouse screening, to more fully integrate the penthouse with the building skin below. In the event that this glass does not extend the full height of the penthouse, the framework that is carried up to the top of the penthouse can be developed as a kind of tracery "crown" element (see 2b. below).

b. Cap: Continuing from 2a., Staff believes that an expressive horizontal element on the very top may further strengthen the roof area, with minimal cost. By slightly extending this element from the remaining roof screening, the design could punctuate the top with a clear finish that contrasts with the red component and glass below.

9. Vocabulary: The building should address grade to sky relationships through thoughtful interpretation of base-middle-top vocabulary and strategies.

a. Skins: The latest design expresses the building vocabularies much more distinctly. However, staff believes that the North and South Skins are still too similar. Staff recommends exploring the following strategies:

i. Color: Explore changing the pre-cast color between the two skins to a greater degree. This might be enough to achieve the desired effect.

ii. Corners: Explore the use of different corner treatments to differentiate between skins, such as glass corners in one skin and solid corners in the other, or extending the corner vocabulary for a skin by continuing the use of the solid corner block throughout the rest of a skin. For example, take the thick, corner band on northwest corner (3-B) and repeat this element in places throughout the North Skin, giving this skin more vertical solid bands.

iii. Solar Response: Consider a more delicate contrast between skins by introducing exterior light shelves on the South Skin.

b. Base: The extension of the horizontal band from the lower north base area to the South Skin is a positive contribution to the building vocabulary. Staff believes the continuation of this band across the red component above the entryway should be explored.

Furthermore, the lower north base area as depicted in 1-B and 2-B gives the impression that this component was "tacked on" to the building. Staff

recommends exploring the relationship between the lower base area and the North Skin, to engage the base within the overall building expression.

c. Red Component: The exploration of the red component adds significantly to the proposed design. Specifically:

   i. Width: Staff favors the wider red component width illustrated in 1-F, as long as it is integrated with the penthouse form

   ii. Coherence:

      - Color: Staff believes the red component's coloring should remain the same throughout this skin. Specifically, the red component's vertical and horizontal elements should utilize the same color. Illustration 3-B offers the clearest expression of this potential. Staff does not support the mixing of the red and pre-cast charcoal elements as depicted in 2-B, both in regard to color and the degree to which the horizontal element tends to dominate.

      - Integration: The slightly randomized spacing of the red vertical features creates gaps that lessen the component's unity. Staff believes more fully integrating the vertical and horizontal red features within the component, such as through overlapping patterns, will strengthen this skin's boldness. This could further emphasize the component's vertical tie from the base (i.e. entry) to the roof.

   iii. "Leaked" Elements: Staff is open to discussion concerning the red elements appearing in three vertical bands on the South Skin (1-F), and also in some of the entry pavement; but, Staff stresses that there needs to be a logic to this language.

10. Entry: The formal relationship between building and entry element(s) should be strong, legible, and consistent with the building parti (design concept).

a. Approach: The narrowing of the entryway's focal point to a distinct space is a positive improvement from the previous design. The relationship between the stairs and the entry has benefitted from the inclusion of the canopy and what appears to be closer proximity between these two features.

b. Elements: Staff believes that the area to the right of the entryway (upon approach from Stovall St.) continues to require further resolution given the various components that all meet at this juncture: Entryway, ramp, north base area, and red component.

c. Open Space: Further information must be provided and the thematic development clarified concerning the plaza area depicted on the site's southeast corner.

11. Security: Any required security measures should read as integral parts of the building and landscape design.

a. No further information has been provided. Staff reaffirms the previous comments.

12. Parking: Above-grade parking garage facades shall be architecturally treated to be in harmony with the overall building and to screen interior light fixtures, pipes and raw concrete.

a. No further information has been provided. Staff reaffirms the previous comments.

Hoffman Block 2 – TSA: Design Evaluation Comments

1/7/2015

The following is a list of design principles that must be satisfied for this project. These issues have been raised in previous staff reports, verbally as well as graphically, and are in keeping with design guidelines expressed in both the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines (approved March, 2006) and the Citywide Design Principles for Alexandria (approved May, 2006).

1. **Forms: The building mass should be articulated, employ predominantly vertical expression, and create an active skyline through varied heights, with a distinctive or articulated tower top.**

    a. The current design reads as a large, massive and squat-proportioned building; the allocation of the two skin types to "front" and "back" has created large expanses of uniform wall, increasing the building's perceived horizontality;
    b. There is no skyline expression, and no variation in height;
    c. There is insufficient variation in skin typologies or orientation;
    d. Where vertical articulation, or hyphens, have been introduced, their proportions are too horizontal and do not result in a dramatic interruption;
    e. In general, the architectural expression proposed does not appear to be commensurate with the high-profile location and intended use.

2. **Penthouse: The mechanical penthouse should be fully integrated into the building design, massing and materiality.**

    a. The proposed penthouse is massive, and reads as a box on top of a box;
    b. The opportunity to integrate the penthouse into the building form could be achieved through the variation in height discussed in 1) above, or through the addition of a distinctive rooftop form.
    c. The Stage 1 DSUP (2014-0027) received approval for a density of 661,386 square feet and height up to 260 feet. The Stage 2 DSUP (2014-0045) proposes only 632,000 square feet of density and 216.68 feet of height, indicating that sufficient building area remains to accomplish the necessary changes here and elsewhere.

3. **Vocabulary: The building should address grade to sky relationships through thoughtful interpretation of base-middle-top vocabulary and strategies.**

    a. The building base treatment is inconsistent between north and south portions and appears disjointed;
    b. Even though most of the building base is separated from public rights-of-way by security elements, its material treatment does not reflect the important location and function of this building;

c. Apart from a slightly wider spandrel in some areas, there is no special treatment given to the building top, either within the fabric of the skin, or in terms of a setback, cornice, or other distinctive formal treatment.

4. Entry: The formal relationship between building and entry element(s) should be strong, legible, and consistent with the building parti (design concept).

a. The entry elements (both the causeway/ramp connection and the glassy element into which it connects) seem unrelated, both to each other and to the adjacent building elements;
b. The connection has become very heavy in its expression, and the filled area supporting it, as well as the exterior stairs, vestibule and canopy, seem to "crowd" the adjacent low wing; they might function better, and more elegantly, as a bridge, with the lower garden continuing through below;
c. The large staircase seems out of place in the context of this architecture: there is no formal relationship between it and the building it serves (see below);
d. The use of a ramp leading to the large flight of stairs creates what could feel like a difficult and off-putting approach: consider accomplishing the level change on the interior of the building, thus creating a much simpler and friendlier approach.

5. Security: Any required security measures should read as integral parts of the building and landscape design.

a. Staff will not support a security solution in this sort of prominent, urban location that incorporates any substantial portion of visible, high, security metal fencing;
b. Required security must be achieved through methods that read as integral and intentional elements of a coordinated landscape design: anti-ram walls (if architecturally treated), cable bollards, boulders, berms, moats and other similar features are encouraged and will be supported if well-designed.

6. Parking: Above-grade parking garage facades shall be architecturally treated to be in harmony with the overall building and to screen interior light fixtures, pipes and raw concrete.

a. While there was positive comment on the precast screening that was shown for a portion of the north garage façade in the previous DRB meeting, the current drawings do not show all of the garage elevations, but clearly show no treatment at all for the south elevation (facing Eisenhower Avenue);
b. Garage treatment, as discussed in the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines, and as has been required by the DRB on many previous projects, needs to be of a very high level of material, design and finish, comparable to the principal building.