



CRA Design Review Committee

Held Virtually on Zoom

Meeting Notes

September 15, 2021

ATTENDEES

Barry Zevin (CRA Board), Kathleen Born (CRA Board), Hugh Russell (Planning Board), Erik Thorkildsen (CDD), Tom Evans (CRA), Alexandra Levering (CRA), Fabiola Alikpokou (CRA), Erica Schwarz (CRA), Susannah Shaw (BXP), Michael Tilford (BXP), Ian Hatch (BXP), Eric Weyant (Stantec), Heather Hoffman (Public)

MXD SUBSTATION RESIDENTIAL BUILDING MASSING AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

PRESENTATION

Eric Weyant from Stantec presented the housing component of the MXD Substation project at 135 Broadway by discussing the overview of the massing and its evolution, constraints and objectives of the site, followed by conceptual building design.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

135 Broadway Building Massing

Largely, committee members noted they were pleased with the direction of the 135 Broadway massing. It was noted the design was thoughtful, and seemed to be in a dialogue with the 145 Broadway building to show that the two buildings relate. It was also noted that the triangular building form was appealing, as there isn't a similar building in the immediate area that follows that massing. It was added that the tower had a simple vertical massing, and that it might be improved if it was more of a foil to the active massing of the Akamai building.

A question was asked if the podium mass aligned with the first 145 Broadway building projection. The architects noted that the floor-to-floor heights are still in flux, but that the two are relatively close in alignment in the current designs. This was responded to favorably, as it adds complexity and meaningful variations to the design. It was asked if, on the ground level, some vestige of the arcade could be carved out to make a connection from Broadway to Center Plaza.

Façade / Materiality

The triangle massing of the building has one facade that is not crenelated, while two are. It was stated the crenelated facades could end up like bay windows for unit living rooms, and that crenelation of the facade that faces Center Park evokes the Marriott's architecture, which is too literal. It was discussed that it seems odd to

have crenelation style a, crenelation style b, and no crenelation on the three respective building facades. The architects responded that they are considering using crenelation on all edges of the building at this time, and that they are also exploring different ways to use crenelation scale. As an example, they could consider one larger scale across the flatter façade that would be reinterpreted as a fine grade scale across the park façade as a way to also give movement to the massing. It was agreed that when considering articulating the flat facade, to not use the style in massing version #2 shown in the presentation, that creates flat slivers of space.

Another opinion was that the three facades could be treated differently, and that it's interesting that the angled crenelated bays in the facade could provide an opportunity for units to have a window facing out toward the views, and a solid treatment facing the office façade so those units could be more closed off from 145 Broadway.

It was also suggested that it would be worth examining the façade materials and colors that Stantec used in the Mass Art dorm at UMass Lowell with metal panel facade and beautiful color.

Setbacks and Street Plane

CDD staff noted their concern of the continuity of the street wall on Broadway, which the K2 Guidelines identifies should be maintained. As such, they expressed concern about the large setback on the south side of the building, and asked instead if the building could be shifted toward the street. In response, some noted that they did not see anything wrong in making variation in the edge, and that this design does it in a thoughtful and useful way.

It was suggested that the street wall requirements might need to be somewhat less rigid. An example of Divco West was provided that now has three new biotech buildings. It was noted the architects of those buildings didn't come up to the property line except for one of the buildings, and that the modulation and the setbacks of those buildings makes the street richer due to the creation of additional pedestrian spaces as a result of those changes. It was added that there is no doubt that the 135 Broadway building is facing Broadway and that the plaza setback is giving views to the 145 Broadway building, but not doing so rigidly.

In response, CDD staff noted that the emphasis of a street wall is the means to accomplish a defined public space. They noted the City is trying to build a Cambridge that has a sense of community and has a representation of the community as a whole of the overall, not an emphasis on an individual human or building. It was added that this conversation is an important conversation happening throughout the architectural field.

It was agreed that if every 100 feet the street wall changed as is proposed with the 135 Broadway building, it would not be a good thing. It was noted that the difference between the imperial neoclassical version of city planning and Greek hill towers that are overrun with tourists is that they are beautiful, and full of triangular plazas that do not confirm to the straight-line notion of a street wall.

Amenity Space

It was asked if the amenity space in 135 Broadway wraps around from Center Plaza to Broadway in the podium. It was noted that the amenity space would be on the south side of the building, due to the sun and interest in staying away from the breathing tree on the Center Plaza side. BXP added that the podium's extra depth in the back of the building will be where they can house mechanical systems, which in other buildings are typically below grade.

Unit Layout

With a triangular massing, it was noted that the building's floorplate was interesting. The idiosyncrasy of the units and their appeal was discussed, and it was noted that while uniquely shaped units have some challenges, that some of the odder units have appeal to tenants. BXP added that it would be worth revisiting Proto to see how that building is operating. BXP also noted that the triangle massing scheme is slightly more efficient in terms of space than ones that are more rectilinear.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

A member of the public noted that cut-throughs, as shown on Broadway, make their heart thrill. They asked if BXP plans to churn residents or if they are looking to create places that induce people to stay. They also noted that every single developer she's asked talked about expanding turnover ~50-100%, and that's not people making homes. They continued to explain that one contact at Divco West showed community gardens, which they liked, and noted residents were going to manage it to encourage people to stay. BXP noted they don't want people to leave after they move in and that if there were suggestions of other ways to make the space great, BXP would consider them.

They continued to note that in all the views, it looks as if no one lives in the surrounding neighborhoods, such as East Cambridge, Wellington-Harrington, and The Port. They wondered if BXP was thinking about what it would look like from those views and hoped that if they came and talked to the neighborhood, they would include those views from community perspectives. BXP noted it's a challenge in presentations to include all materials, because this presentation was focused on massing, but that in the IDCP submission the massing views are shown from from Ahearn field, and the Kennedy Longfellow School. With modeling BXP noted that's pretty easy to do, and add that that's part of the conversation.

It was asked if BXP was thinking about green roofs, or other ways to incorporate green growing things outside of the building. BXP noted that they have exceeded the sustainability and green roof requirements for 325 Main Street and 145 Broadway. In fact, it was noted that 145 Broadway is one of the few buildings in the United States that has achieved LEED v4 Platinum and Wellness certification, partially because of the green roofs on top of the building projections and on the roof. BXP noted that for 135 Broadway, they have a goal of planting and putting solar on the roof.