

January 13, 2023

Caroline Skuncik, Executive Director
I-195 Redevelopment District Commission
225 Dyer Street, Fourth Floor,
Providence, RI 02903

utile

RE: Parcel 42 Concept Plan Approval Recommendation

Design Review Panel Contributors:

- Craig Barton, Design Review Panel Member
- Emily Vogler, Design Review Panel Member
- Jack Ryan, Design Review Panel Member
- Tim Love, Utile
- Zoë Mueller, Utile

Dear Caroline,

Utile and the I-195 Redevelopment District Design Review Panel met on January 5, 2023 to review the revised Concept Plan Application materials provided by Fane for their proposed mixed use “Hope Point Tower” development on Parcel 42. As a result of that meeting and a more detailed review of the application materials, Utile recommends that the Commission not grant Concept Plan Approval of the updated Fane proposal until and unless there are significant design revisions that address the comments below.

In addition, Utile recommends that the Commission delay the approval of the requested waivers and text amendments to the Commission’s original Concept Design approval until the design issues are addressed. The full assessment of the requested waivers and amendments along with Utile’s comments can be found in the Appendix to this memo.

Rationale to Delay Concept Plan Approval

1. Potential Wind Impacts
 - a. Given the elimination of the majority balconies (which provided some “roughness” to disrupt wind patterns) and the reduction of the setback of the tower from the podium to 5 feet along Dyer Street, there is an increased likelihood that the tower will accelerate wind speed with significant negative impacts on the park, especially during the winter months. This potential is compounded by the airfoil-like shape of the tower plan and the direction of the strongest prevailing winds, as determined in a wind rose analysis. A wind study by RWDI, Arup, or another nationally-recognized wind engineer should be performed to determine the extent of wind impacts and potential mitigation measures.
2. Unsatisfactory Podium Design
 - a. The proposed design of the podium lacks the positive design qualities of the original proposal. It is simplistic and lacks interest at an intermediate scale.
 - b. The original proposal’s scale and design language had a more successful relationship to the 225 Dyer building across the street and

the larger urban context because of the rhythm of the facade elements and rich interplay of materials and colors.

3. Unsatisfactory Tower Design

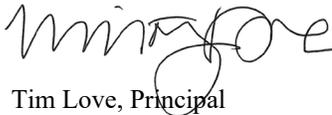
- a. The removal of the sculptural balconies eliminates the tower's most distinguishing feature and results in an overly monolithic structure without the unique form and intermediate scalar interest of the original proposal. The original approval of the tower as a punctuation in the urban fabric was predicated on its signature form and promise that it would be a landmark on the skyline.

4. Unsatisfactory Site Plan & Park Activation

- a. Three garage doors with concentrated vehicular circulation and loading off Dorrance Street, the primary pedestrian gateway into the park, is both undesirable and unsafe, and is antithetical to the goal of establishing Dorrance Street as a gateway to the park from Downtown Providence.
- b. The originally approved Concept Plan had a single access door that served both the loading and parking functions. The Fane design team should return to that solution.
- c. The siting and screening of the building transformers results in an extensive inactive and unsightly facade facing the park. These transformers should either be sited out of view in a vault underground, or be screened with more sensitive materials and plantings to ensure a better interface with the park.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions or would like additional information.

Regards,



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Appendix

Utile Memo / January 13, 2022

Due to significant changes in the distinguishing features of the design since the Concept Design approval was originally granted, Utile, the I-195 Redevelopment District's Urban Design and Planning consultant, recommends approval of some but not all of the waivers to *Section 606, Design Standards for New Construction, of the Providence Zoning Ordinance* requested by the Fane organization. In addition, Utile recommends acceptance of some but not all of the requested amendments to the project description included in the Commission's Concept Plan Approval Resolution dated October 16, 2019. A full description of the language requested by the Fane organization and Utile's comments are provided below.

Requested waivers and the rationale for acceptance or denial

1. **606.A.2:** Building height and massing shall relate to adjacent structures.
 - a. *Fane Rationale: The proposed high-rise building will feature a residential tower sitting on top of a 4-story podium that will be lower in height than the Wexford Innovation Building across the street. The tower superstructure will be set back from the top floor of the podium by a minimum dimension of 5' -0". This setback will provide a visual and physical transition in the block massing that will provide a consistent street wall height along Dyer Street. The revised podium is less intrusive and more attractive and visually friendly to the streetscape, as the relationship of the building mass at street level to surrounding structures and areas is appropriate in that the height of the structure, as specifically mandated and approved by the Providence City Council, has been designed in such a way as to minimize any potential adverse impacts and to successfully integrate the structure into surrounding areas including the closest building, in a way that is in harmony with the spirit and intent of the underlying requirement.*

Utile recommends that the waiver request above not be approved at this time because the new design for the podium does not have the same contextual relationship to the existing urban context as the original proposal and the reduction of the setback of the tower from the podium from 10' to 5' may increase the negative wind impacts at sidewalk and park level (see the design review comments above).

2. **606.D.1:** Building facades shall be built within a build-to-zone of between zero and eight feet from the street line. Such facades shall occupy this build-to-zone for at least 80% of each lot frontage of the property. These provisions may be waived to create courtyards, wider sidewalks, open space, and/or outdoor seating.
 - a. *Fane Rationale: This refers to the proposed curved podium nose at the corner of Dyer and Dorrance Streets which is set back 23' from the property line at the corner. This set back is required to allow for the creation of a "European style" urban square that will allow for cafes or restaurant activities to spill into the street and create a vibrant and active street edge. The de minimis deviation embodied in the plans at the corner of Dorrance and Dyer Streets allows for a minimal recess that enhance the relationship of the structure to the streetscape at that location. Also, Section 606.D.1 includes within it that, "These*

provisions may be waived to create ... wider sidewalks, [or] open space " Approval of this waiver will create greater public access space in this area and enhanced public enjoyment of the streetscape.

Utile recommends granting the waiver above.

3. **606.D.2:** A building facade shall have a transition line. Transition lines shall be designed in proportion to the overall height and mass of the proposed building to create a distinction between upper and lower stories. Transition lines shall relate to existing adjoining buildings.
 - a. *Fane Rationale: In addition to the building massing strategy described with regard to the Waiver Request for Section 606.A.2 above, the upper portion of the podium exterior has been carefully articulated to emulate the horizontal expression of the tower structure above by introduction of white horizontal metal banding. This design approach will generate a cohesive vocabulary between the podium and the tower shaft. The grade related areas are mostly glazed and resemble the vocabulary, height, and scale of adjacent buildings. The transition lines reflected in the Design. Plans, particularly where the high-rise residential portions of the tower are significantly recessed from the building podium, relates to adjacent and existing structures on Dyer Street and create a clear and appropriate distinction between upper and lower portions of the building in a practical way that is in harmony with the spirit and intent of the requirement.*

Utile recommends that the waiver request above not be approved at this time because the new design for the podium does not have the same visual interest and relationship to the existing urban context as the original proposal (see the design review comments above).

4. **606.E.3:** Upper story facade shall provide areas of transparency equal to at least 35% of the wall area of the story.
 - a. *Fane Rationale: The upper floors of the podium, which will be occupied by vehicular parking, will not meet this requirement. The podium upper floor facade is designed with continuous metal bandings and perforated metal panels to screen the parking structure and vehicles from the pedestrian realm as well as providing natural ventilation to create a green and sustainable parking structure and to reduce the carbon footprint of the building by saving electricity.*

Utile recommends that this waiver request not be approved at this time because the new design for the podium does not have the compositional interest as the original Concept Design approved by the Commission (see design review comments above).

Requested language amendments and the rationale for acceptance or denial

Utile recommends that the Commission approve all of the Fane team's proposed amendments to the "Tower, Podium, Uses, Parking" categories of the Commission's Concept Plan Approval Resolution dated October 16 of 2019, but deny some of the proposed amendments to the "Exhibit A - Special Features" category of that resolution, as indicated below.

Tower, Podium, Uses, Parking

Overall project description to be revised as follows:

- *The podium is being reduced from 6 to 4 stories, which will improve the scale of the podium structure from a pedestrian perspective and will create a better transition to the adjacent park.*
- *While the height of the building (i.e. up to 600') is unchanged, the number of floors has been increased from 46 stories to 47 stories. Despite the increase in the number of floors, the overall height of the building will not change. This has been achieved by reducing the overall podium height as well as reducing the floor-to-floor height of a portion of tower accommodating residential units.*
- *The tower plate area is increased from 12,900 sf to 15,550 sf.*
- *The total amount of indoor amenity area is increased from 7,000 sf to 12,500 sf.*
- *The overall height of the podium is reduced from 68'-6" to 53'-0".*
- *The total number of residential parking spaces is reduced from +/-329 spots to +/-166 spots. This parking reduction is supported by Analysis done by the Fane Organization on trends in parking demand and the availability of nearby public parking, as needed.*
- *The total number of residential units will be 618 comprised of:*
- *Studio: 58 units*
- *1 Bed: 366 units*
- *2 Bed: 168 units*
- *3 Bed: 36 units*
- *Total GFA of the development will be 715,000 sf.*
- *The total Retail GFA (included in item 5.8.) will be 8,500 sf.*
- *The total Office GF A (included in item 5.8.) will be 3,000 sf.*
- *The building setbacks from property line will be as per Exhibit B diagram (Podium and Tower Location) to the Approval Resolution and MAP 2 of the Drawing set issued for I-195 Commission review dated 04 November 2022.*
- *Utile recommends approval for all of the amendments listed above.*

Exhibit A - Special Features

Item 1.e. to be revised as follows:

- *Approval Resolution: The upper floors of the podium (floors 2-6) are a parking garage accessed by a series of stacked ramps.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The upper floors of the podium (floors 2-4) are programmed as a vehicular parking garage. A conventional ramp from ground to L2 will provide access from Dorrance Street while a continuous sloping parking slab will provide access to the upper parking levels.*

Utile recommends approval of the above amendment to Item 1e.

Item 1.f. to be revised as follows:

- *Approval Resolution: The entire area of the roof of the podium is landscaped with both planted and hardscape areas. In addition, a trellis structure is located on the southwest corner of the podium rooftop garden facing the pedestrian bridge.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The entire area of the roof of the podium is landscaped with both planted and hardscape areas. In addition, some cabana style and raised shading structures will be located at the south and east side of the podium rooftop garden.*

Utile recommends approval of the above amendment to Item 1f.

Item 1.g. to be revised as follows:

- *Approval Resolution: The tower is a trapezoid in plan with rounded corners. It is set back from the face of the podium 10 feet along Dyer Street, 16 feet along Dorrance Street, and 34 feet from the open space that flanks the City Walk path on the south side of the building. See the attached diagram.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The tower shaft is a trapezoid in plan with rounded corners. Proposed tower setbacks from the outer face of the podium are 5' along Dyer Street, 10' 10" feet along Dorrance Street, and 28' from the open space that flanks the City Walk path on the south side of the building. See attached diagram.*

Utile recommends rejection of the above amendment to Item 1g because a 5 foot tower setback along Dyer Street is inadequate visually and may result in sidewalk level wind impacts (see design review comments above).

Item 1.h. to be revised as follows:

- *Approval Resolution: The floors of the tower have the same interior configuration, but the floor slabs extend beyond the window wall in different increments to create striking balconies that wrap around the building as the floors climb to the sky. This creates the overall asymmetrical sculptural form of building, its most distinguishing feature and the defining characteristic by which design approval is granted.*
- *Proposed Amendment: Terraces wrapping around the entire building have been modified, so that the tower now has balconies only on the northern and southern edges of the building This gives the tower a more symmetrical and visually-pleasing sculptural form, while also providing a significantly more cost-effective design.*

Utile recommends denial of the above amendment to Item 1h because the removal of the sculptural balconies eliminates the tower's most distinguishing feature and results in an overly monolithic structure with the intermediate scalar interest of the original proposal. The original approval of the tower was predicated on its signature form and promise that it would be a landmark on the skyline.

Item 2.a. to be revised to as follows:

- *Approval Resolution: The tower form is predicated on the interplay of floor-to-ceiling glazing in the apartments and the glass railing that lines the exterior balconies of the tower. The effect is further enhanced by the use of frit glass with a changing density of white "pixels". This gradated frit creates a more translucent effect near the balcony floor and a more transparent effect towards the top edge of the railing.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The tower exterior materiality is predicated on the interplay of floor-to-ceiling glazing and continues horizontal metal white bandings terminating with white fritted glass railing at the North and South curved edges of the tower. This balcony gradated glass frit features an opaque effect near the balcony floor and a more transparent effect towards the top edge of the railing.*

The above amendment to Item 2a is only necessary because of the removal of balconies, which Utile does not support.

Item 2.c to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The podium facades have a rich interplay of materials that break down the overall scale of the building at the street level and help tie the project to the new development across Dyer Street.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The podium facades have a rich interplay of horizontal white metal panel bandings and perforated metal panels that break down the overall scale of the building at the street level visually connecting the podium to the tower creating a cohesive exterior massing.*

Item 2.d. to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The podium facade is comprised of two overlaid facade systems that help give the podium a sense of texture and depth because of the shadows the layered elements will generate.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The podium facade is comprised of a glassy and transparent grade related retail area and more solid upper podium parking levels. The two overlaid facade systems are giving the podium a three-dimensional texture and depth generating an interesting and vibrant facade facing the street.*

Item 2.e. to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The outer layer is a series of frames that sit on metal clad columns with stone bases. The frames reference some of the proportions and materials of the Wexford Innovation Building, while complementing the sculptural tower above.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The lower portion of the podium facade facing Dyer Street and City Walk is mostly glazed with a series of metal clad columns with stone bases.*

Item 2.f. to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The frames are organized into a rhythm of bays that include an orchestrated mix of materials, including two finishes of precast panels, dark grey metal louvers, and glazing with true mullions that are organized in an interesting large-scale running bond pattern.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The upper portion of the podium facade is emulating the horizontal expression of the tower above featuring the introduction of strong white horizontal metal banding with an additional layer of perforated metal panels. The perforated metal panels are concealing the parking garage and providing natural ventilation in order to eliminate any need for mechanical ventilation and therefore reducing the carbon footprint of the development.*

Item 2.g. to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The depth of the precast panels give the frame components of the podium facade a sculptural presence, especially in contrast to the complementary taut glass skin used at the corners of the podium and over the building entrances.*
- *Proposed Amendment: All of the podium corners at the southwest, southeast, east and north side of the building are featuring curved shapes with perforated metal panels that will soften the visual appearance of the podium from the public realm and the adjacent park with a more harmonious look than the previous panel design.*

Utile recommends denial of the above requested amendments to Items 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, and 2g because the current design of the podium lacks positive design qualities of the original proposal. It is simplistic and lacks interest at an intermediate scale. As a result, it has the negative visual characteristics of a suburban office building, including unbroken horizontal openings and spandrel panels.

Item 3.a. to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The distribution of retail spaces help contribute to the activation of the public realm. The smaller of the two spaces, facing the Dyer Street/Dorrance Street corner, is well-located for a cafe or restaurant with outdoor seating. Likewise, the larger retail space that faces City Walk and the park will invite activity on the small plaza and behind the full height storefront.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The distribution of retail spaces at ground floor will be contributing to the activation of the building facades facing the public realm. The smaller of the two spaces, facing the Dyer Street/Dorrance Street corner, is ideal for a European- style cafe or restaurant with outdoor seating. The larger spaces facing Dyer Street will provide for flexibility of uses and will complement the innovation center across the street with commercial and retail activity that add life to the neighborhood, with conveniences for the neighbors.*

Utile recommends approval of the above amendment to Item 3a.

Item 3.b. to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The use of accordion "cafe doors" where restaurants, cafes, retail stores and similar uses are located along the south facade will further enhance this sense of indoor-outdoor connectivity while encouraging the tenant to open up the space to the patio in good weather.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The bike room main access is located at the curved southwest corner of the building to minimize interference with other functions.*

Item 3.c. to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: By combining the service vehicle and parking entrances in a single vehicle access point off of Dorrance Street, disruptions to the public realm have been minimized.*
- *Proposed Amendment: Separate side-by-side ramp access to parking and garbage/ loading facilities will provide for minimum visual impact and disruptions on the pedestrian environment. The truck maneuvering required to access and exit the site will occur fully within the property boundaries.*

Utile has no comment on the above requested amendments to Items 3b and 3c because they are not addressing design issues.

Item 3.f to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: The inclusion of a patio area on public land along the south side of the building and adjacent to the City Walk path will help activate the public realm and serve as an amenity for the abutting ground level tenant. Please note that the tenant will need to enter into a separate agreement to get permission to use the patio for outdoor dining.*
- *Proposed Amendment: The inclusion of a patio area on public land along the south side of the building and adjacent to the City Walk path will help activate the public realm. The Commission and Developer will need to enter into a separate agreement with regard to their respective duties and responsibilities for the patio area.*

Utile has no comment on the above requested amendment to Item 3f because it is not addressing design issues.

Item 3.g to be revised as follows:

- *Resolution Approval: A lack of permanent barriers between the outdoor patio and sidewalk, as shown in the approved plans, is required in order to clearly*

communicate that the patio is a public space (notwithstanding the understanding that a tenant may add temporary barriers as part of an agreement to operate an outdoor cafe).

- *Proposed Amendment: A lack of permanent barriers between the outdoor patio and sidewalk, as shown in the approved plans, is required in order to clearly communicate that the patio is a public space (notwithstanding the understanding that the Developer may add temporary barriers as part of an agreement with the Commission regarding the patio).*

Utile has no comment on the above requested amendment to Item 3g because it is not addressing design issues.