

May 12, 2023

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

utile

RE: Parcel 2 Concept Plan Design Review Comments

Design Review Panel Contributors:

- Craig Barton, Design Review Panel
- Emily Vogler, Design Review Panel
- Jack Ryan, Design Review Panel
- Peter Van Erp, Neighborhood Association Design Representative, Downtown Neighborhood Association
- Leslie Myers, Neighborhood Association Design Representative, Fox Point Neighborhood Association
- Lorenzo Apicella, Neighborhood Association Design Representative, The Jewelry District Association
- Jon-Paul (JP) Couture, Neighborhood Association Design Representative, Mile of History Association
- Tim Love, Utile
- Zoë Mueller, Utile

Dear Caroline,

Utile and the I-195 Redevelopment District Design Review Panel met on May 9th of 2023 to review Urbanica's revised massing and design concept for Phase 2 of their proposed mixed-use development on Parcel 2. The designated neighborhood association design representatives were invited to join this meeting and all that were not able to attend the meeting were included in a follow-up meeting to discuss and refine the design review feedback included in this memo, which was circulated via email for feedback prior to posting. The comments below are meant to inform potential revisions to the design prior to Concept and Final Plan Approval.

The overall design vision of the project has evolved considerably since the proposal stage. The new design vision is equally strong as the initial vision and is even more responsive to the unique site conditions and context. The development team has shown uncommon versatility, commitment, and willingness to listen to and respond to local stakeholder feedback on the project's design direction.

The resulting project has many irregular angular conditions that are responsive to the various easements and site constraints similar to local historic development patterns. This is generally positive in that it creates varied, contextually-sensitive moments that read as a composition of smaller individual buildings rather than a single monolithic building. However, there are moments that verge on being overworked or too busy. As part of the Design Review process, the Design Review Panel hopes to see the design team reduce the overall number of design moves in order to achieve a slightly more intentional and subtle composition in plan and in the massing and facade detailing and fenestration. Our expectation is that much of this will naturally get worked out through the refinement of the internal program configuration and unit layouts.

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Site Plan & Public Realm

1. The complex site conditions have been handled well, and the more open-air treatment of the Transit Street gateway has great potential to capitalize on an existing intuitive pedestrian desire line and create varied experiences that are responsive to the unique lighting conditions throughout the day.
2. The extensive ground floor transparency is promising and well-placed to activate the public realm. However, it is critical that the programs identified for the residential amenity spaces provide sufficient activation. It will be important that those programs are further defined as the design progresses, especially for the program facing South Water Street.
3. The landscape strategy is promising but not fully resolved, which is to be expected at this stage of the project.
4. There are some accessibility details that need to be worked out as the public realm design advances. The primary curved accessible route to the plaza podium level would benefit from having some of the retaining wall carved away to improve its visibility and encourage intuitive navigation. The accessible route to the cafe space at the corner of James Street and South Water Street as well as the arcade that rises above it needs to be clarified.
5. The corner plaza at James Street and South Water Street should be further studied to determine if a cafe is the most effective program to activate the space.

Massing & Building Expression

1. The stepped massing response to the built fabric along James Street and the distinctive massing along Main and Water Street are effective.
2. The removal of the bridge over the Transit Street easement provides a clear view and allows the project to have a natural growth of scale from north to south.
3. The monumental quality of the ends of the building massing and facade treatment facing the internal plaza and James Street frontages is generally effective and the use of bay windows to punctuate these facades is promising.
4. The spatial definition of the corner plaza at James Street and South Water Street should be strengthened in order to hold the corner with more strength and confidence. The current scheme is overly deferential to the rear facade of the historic building.
5. The kink of the gray building volumes facing the courtyard and along South Main may be an example of where there is one move too many.

Facade Design

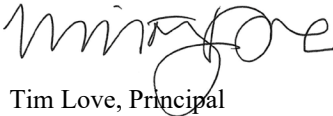
1. The multi-layered depth of facade and use of vertical piers works well.
2. The strength of the underlying facade logic needs to be carried to the few remaining large unresolved or underdeveloped facades (e.g., the monolithic rear facade of the five-story mass facing the river should be broken down or articulated in some way).
3. The piers would benefit from a more unified resolution at the top of the building. This could, for example, be addressed through a unified cornice line.
4. The asymmetrical bays and wood-paneled fenestration is engaging and promising, but the pattern of fenestration could be deployed in a more intentional way as the unit floor plans are developed.
5. The bay window approach is most effective when the bay stops shy of the top floor allowing for a stronger, more unified approach to the top of the building.
6. The James Street facades would benefit from a slightly simpler and more unified approach.

Materiality

1. The hand-wrought texture introduced by the terracotta shingling system combined with wood and metal framing of the fenestration creates a depth and historically-conscious tactile quality that is responsive to the unique context of this parcel.
2. The use of two different colors of terracotta shingles is effective at breaking down the overall mass and creating distinctive atmospheres. It would be helpful to see an exploration of the degree to which this objective could be achieved with a more subtle shift in the texture via exposure and coursing instead of color.
3. It will be important to address the detailing of a shingle system early to resolve difficult transitions such as corners and how the shingled condition is mediated to meet the ground plane. This is particularly important because the multi-layer pier approach to the facade combined with the kinks in plan create many fine-grained corner conditions to resolve.
4. A close study of the final material color choices, including studying the performance of those colors at a distance in relationship to the context, will be an important step as the project advances through design development to construction drawings.

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

Regards,



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