



December 15, 2023

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

**RE: Parcel 1A Pre-Selection Design Review Panel Comments**

Design Review Panel Contributors:

- Craig Barton, Design Review Panel
- Emily Vogler, Design Review Panel
- Jack Ryan, Design Review Panel
- Tim Love, Utile
- Kevin Chong, Utile

Dear Caroline,

Utile and the I-195 Redevelopment District Design Review Panel convened on November 27, 2023 to review and discuss the architectural drawings and building program information provided by the four development teams that submitted proposals for Parcel 1A. The Panel reviewed the designs that had been submitted by the four development teams to evaluate macro-level urban design issues for each. In addition, clarifying questions compiled by the District and Utile were sent to each development team on November 22, 2023, prior to the Design Review Panel meeting.

This pre-selection review does not replace the detailed design review process that will be conducted in partnership with the selected developer. The goal of providing design feedback at this stage is to advise the Commission on which program and development team demonstrates the most potential to produce a compelling, context-sensitive design for the site that best aligns with the District's Development Plan objectives based on the approach each team has taken thus far.

Each proposal represents a very different vision for the site with corresponding differences in their approach to building massing, riverfront access, and public realm activation. We have provided detailed comments below to inform the Commission's selection of a preferred development team.

**Proposal by Riverwalk JV (Urban Spaces / Parent + Diamond)**

1. Building Massing & Site Plan:
  - a. Visual access and permeability to the riverfront is maintained through wood-clad “urban portals” and fully transparent retail, restaurant, and function room programs.
  - b. The low three-story profile of the building is a full story lower than what seems appropriate on this stretch of South Water Street. It does not fully leverage the development capacity of the site nor respond well to the much taller building on the east side of South Main Street.
  
2. Public Realm Activation: While the ground level restaurant, amenity spaces, and two floors of residential units above will bring year-round activity to the site, there is also a risk that the intimate domestic scale will make the riverfront feel like it’s the private domain of the residents of the building and the patrons of the restaurant. As currently designed, the open space looks like it is an extension of the private spaces of the building and not a truly public space that is welcoming to all. The treatment of the river-facing plaza space and wayfinding and signage will be critical to retain the impression of shared, public space.

**Proposal by Riverside Partners (Brass Rat / Stack&Co.)**

1. Building Massing & Site Plan: The inclusion of five levels of condominiums above two podium levels providing commercial, retail, and public space makes this the tallest of the four submissions. By taking advantage of the full developable height and aligning the building with another six story building across the street, this proposal is able to:
  - a. Preserve key view corridors,
  - b. Leave a portion of the site area open, and
  - c. Integrate public bleachers on the south end of the site as well as a public sloped pathway surrounded by plantings that connect the public ground and mezzanine levels.

However, the public sloped pathway as shown currently is within the Urban Coastal Greenway.
  
2. Public Realm Activation:
  - a. The ground level design and program represents a thoughtful approach to activate South Water Street.
  - b. While the additional public space provided at the mezzanine level is welcome, there is a risk that it could feel like a private space. The success of the public realm at the mezzanine level will be influenced by the program of the enclosed areas there. Entrances to stairs

leading down to the retail spaces, as shown in the proposal, might make the open air mezzanine level feel less public.

**utile**

***Proposal by Providence Flea***

1. Building Massing & Site Plan: The cantilevered steel structure on concrete piers with ceiling light fixtures provides visual and physical access to the riverfront from South Water Street. However, the overhang extends over the Urban Coastal Greenway, the proposal will not provide plantings in the Greenway, and the structure may fall short of providing a functional solution:
  - a. During rain events it may provide limited protection due to its height and lack of vertical enclosure, and
  - b. A large shady area may not be an asset during the shoulder seasons, precisely the time of the year when outdoor activities may want to be extended.
2. Public Realm Activation: The proposal provides minimal improvements to the site to enhance interest and comfort other than shade in the summer months. Furthermore, the lack of a clear vision for weekday and off-season activation, when the Providence Flea is not using the structure, has the potential to undermine the success of the project. If the proposal is truly meant to activate the space, it should include more diverse uses, including a cafe or restaurant, provide public restrooms, and include an explicit plan for complementary programming, operations and maintenance, and governance.

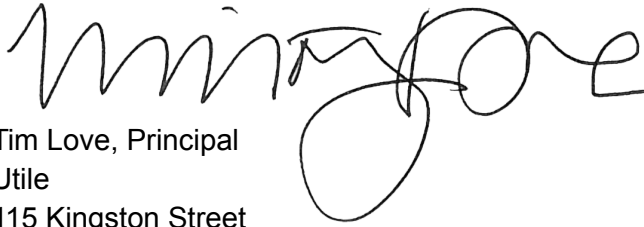
***Proposal by Providence Architecture & Building Company***

1. Building Massing & Architectural Expression: The scale and massing of this proposal is the most responsive to the varied scales along this portion of South Water Street. The three-building scheme helps to break up the overall scale of the project and frames the historic alignments of the former riverfront gangways. While the massing relates well to the surrounding context, the stylistic choices lack a clear point of view in relationship to the interior planning logics and proposed construction systems.
2. Public Realm Activation: The mix of restaurant, retail, office uses, and two housing units will help activate the site at all times of the day and days of the week.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions or would like additional information on any of these comments.

**utile**

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Love". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Tim Love, Principal  
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Boston, MA 02111