

U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS 17 MAY 1910

401 F STREET NW SUITE 312 WASHINGTON DC 20001-2728 202-504-2200 FAX 202-504-2195 WWW.CFA.GOV

27 July 2017

Dear Mr. Kenner:

In its meeting of 20 July, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a concept proposal submitted by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development for public space elements of the Southwest Waterfront development, known as the District Wharf. These components are associated with Phase 2 of the development and include concept designs for the Marina Way streetscape and the M Street Landing and Terrace parks, as well as extensions of the Phase 1 designs for the Maine Avenue streetscape and the wharf promenade. The Commission approved the concept submission with the following comments.

The Commission members expressed support for each component of the proposal, commending the overall simplicity of the designs. They welcomed the contrast between the consistent linear treatment along the development's edges—Maine Avenue and the wharf promenade—and the varied, distinctive designs of the park spaces. To create an overall sense of unity for pedestrians, who will generally experience the various open spaces as one continuous environment, they suggested that the particular open spaces could be further informed by a common palette of materials. They recommended careful study of the zones where the projects' paving fields adjoin to ensure suitable transitions, requiring the designers of the different spaces to further coordinate the planting and material palettes.

For the individual projects, the Commission members expressed support for the proposed curbside streetscape treatment of Marina Way, while requesting further study of the number and placement of bollards to ensure a satisfactory balance between an open character and pedestrian safety. They commented favorably on the design for the M Street Landing park, praising its fountain plaza as an effective transition space between the intensive development to the northwest and the grassy Waterfront Park to the southeast. Observing the potential conflict between this park's attractiveness to families and its adjacency to busy Maine Avenue, they suggested studying the configuration of the petal-shaped berms and benches around the central fountain to better enclose the park and make it safer for young children. Regarding the Terrace park, they suggested that the design should be more strongly influenced by the adjacent buildings and open spaces. They questioned the selection and placement of cherry trees proposed to be planted behind the stepped seating adjacent to the bioretention garden; they recommended selecting a larger tree species to provide more shade and to convey a more suitable scale in relation to the waterfront and the adjacent building proposed for Parcel 10. Likewise, they said that creating a denser area of shade trees and plantings around the central lawn and bioretention garden could achieve the intended framing of an outdoor room; they suggested that the stepped seating not be rectilinear but rather jut out into the landscape, like the prow of a ship. They also remarked that the plantings lining the curving pathways have a fragmented yet strangely regimented quality, and they instead suggested a wilder palette of plantings within a single expressive gesture.

The Commission's consideration of the District Wharf in this meeting included review of four buildings in Phase 2, submitted as private-sector proposals in accordance with the Shipstead-Luce Act. For your reference, enclosed is the letter describing the review of these projects,

including numerous comments on the desirability of coordinating the design of the buildings and open spaces of this extensive development.

The Commission looks forward to further review of the public spaces associated with the second phase of the District Wharf project, and encourages continued coordination between the landscape and building designers, especially for the Terrace park and its surrounding parcels. In preparation for the next submission, please consult with the staff which, as always, is available to assist you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Luebke', written in a cursive style.

Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Brian T. Kenner
Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 317
Washington, DC 20004

Encl.: CFA letter of 27 July 2017 on Shipstead-Luce Act submissions at the District Wharf

cc: Shawn Seaman, Hoffman-Madison Waterfront
Hilary Bertsch, EEK/Perkins Eastman
Mary Wolf, Wolf|Josey Landscape Architects
Nate Trevethan, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

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27 July 2017

Dear Mr. Seaman:

In its meeting of 20 July, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed concept proposals for four buildings in Phase 2, components of the proposed Southwest Waterfront development, known as the District Wharf: Water Building 2 (SL 17-136, 630 Wharf Street, SW); Water Building 3 (SL 17-137, 584 Wharf Street, SW); Parcel 9 (SL 17-134, 620 Maine Avenue, SW); and Parcel 10 (17-135, 590 Maine Avenue, SW). The Commission approved the submitted concept designs with the following comments.

In general, the Commission members affirmed their support for the project as a whole, and they expressed appreciation for the high standard of design that has been applied to the Phase 2 projects presented in the meeting. They urged the individual design teams to collaborate more closely in order to create stronger relationships between the buildings, as well as between the buildings and the public spaces around them, finding that the individual projects appear to have been designed without a thorough awareness of their immediate context or of the District Wharf development as a whole.

Water Building 2. In their action to approve the concept, the Commission members commented on the proposal as a promising design approach of interlocking volumes with contrasting cladding materials. They suggested further development of the facade materials to create a more sophisticated weaving effect, in order to avoid an overly simplistic appearance. They also recommended that the spacing and orientation of the vertical slats on the facades be refined in relation to the sun's path. They emphasized the close relationship of the building to the adjacent wharf promenade, and they cited the proposed exterior stairs as an extension of the wharf and park landscape to the northeast, as well as a feature of the building. They suggested developing the design with an awareness of this dual role; for example, instead of having the character of a stair along an alley, the plan of the stair could open to the promenade and park landscape, with wider treads and shorter risers to be more consistent with the landscape setting. They also suggested further consideration of the adjacent space on the promenade in relation to Parcel 9 and the other public spaces, observing that this part of the waterfront area seems to be an underdeveloped design.

Water Building 3. While approving the concept as an imaginative design approach, the Commission members emphasized the building's role as a service support facility for the residents of the boats docked at the adjacent piers; they recommended simplifying the design to avoid its misperception as another public attraction along the wharf. They suggested that this floating building engage more with the water than with the land, perhaps by reorienting it slightly to create a separation from the wharf; they added that a domestic scale for the entrance would be more fitting for the building's purpose. They questioned the extensive use of metal on the exterior, commenting that it would be uncomfortable to the touch during temperature extremes. Observing that the presentation drawings instead seem to suggest the use of wood, they recommended consideration of wood as a cladding material, which would also help to relate the building to the other water buildings.

Finally, they suggested a wilder landscape character for the proposed roof plantings, instead of the appearance of a trimmed lawn.

In their discussion of Water Building 3, the Commission members also commented on its unresolved relationship to the adjacent Terrace park, including the impact of this building on the park's landscape features and views; they recommended consultation between the two design teams for the building and the park. In particular, they noted that the waterfront view from the park's stepped seating along the rectangular bioretention garden would be largely obscured by the building in its proposed location; the slight reorientation of the water building suggested by the Commission could ameliorate this condition. They also observed that the seating area could effectively serve as a gathering place for the boat residents, and that its design could be developed to support this character as well as to reorient views toward the water.

Parcel 9. The Commission members approved the concept for this building, observing that the proposed design for this prominent site at an inflection point in the District Wharf development suitably departs from the more rectilinear urban design approach taken in the earlier buildings of the development project. They commented that while its conspicuously curved and tilted shape could appear odd in the context of the other District Wharf buildings, it could also produce a refreshing and elegant building if detailed well; they cautioned that the excessive tilt of the primary building volume could be disorienting and suggested reducing it. They expressed appreciation for the stepping down of the building's massing to address the smaller-scale public space of Marina Way; however, they questioned the resolution of the transitions between the different volumes, particularly at the Maine Avenue and wharf promenade facades, commenting that these areas need to be clarified to avoid appearing heavy and ponderous in contrast with the broadly curving southeast facade. They requested additional documentation of both of these conditions, including eye-level views looking toward the building from the northwest along the wharf promenade and from the north at Maine Avenue.

Parcel 10. In their approval of this project, the Commission members expressed support for the design parti—a series of taut, rotated glass boxes stacked on a plinth—and they advised strengthening this parti by more fully connecting the plinth to the adjacent public spaces of the M Street Landing park, the Terrace park, and the wharf promenade. They recommended that the amphitheater be enlarged to be more generous and open to the M Street Landing park and to the promenade, and they suggested that form of the plinth could be extended into the landscape of the Terrace park to create the sense of a continuous public space over the top of the plinth, heightening the contrast with the glass boxes above. They noted that the plinth has the capacity to engage with the highly differing contexts on each of the building's four sides, and they recommended that the relationship with the church and residential buildings on Parcel 11 also be further studied, particularly in the design of the ground plane. Finally, they suggested that the glassy upper volumes could benefit from the addition of sun-shading elements, which could also give the building more of a waterfront character.

In conclusion, the Commission members reiterated the fundamental importance of designing the buildings and public spaces so that the design of each informs the others, with overlap

and coordination in the formation of a coherent whole. While supporting the overall approach to designing the building and landscape components of Phase 2 as distinctive pieces, they emphasized that these pieces should still be perceived as a related ensemble, and that the seams between each piece must be strong. They requested that the next submission include a landscape and public space plan that presents the conceptual ideas for each space in relationship to the others, and that each individual building and landscape project show more of the context of nearby buildings and public spaces.

The Commission's consideration of the District Wharf in this meeting also included review of the public spaces associated with this part of the Phase 2 development, submitted for review by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. For your reference, the letter describing the review of these projects is enclosed.

The Commission looks forward to further review of the various components of the District Wharf development. In preparation for the next submission, please consult with the staff which, as always, is available to assist you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Luebke', written in a cursive style.

Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Shawn Seaman
Hoffman-Madison Waterfront
690 Water Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Encl.: CFA letter of 27 July 2017 on public space submissions at the District Wharf

cc: Sital Patel, S9Architecture
Hiroshi Jacobs, Studios Architecture
Jay Bargmann, Rafael Viñoly Architects
Morris Adjmi, Morris Adjmi Architects
Jennifer Steingasser, D.C. Office of Planning
Melinda Bolling, D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

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29 September 2017

Dear Mr. Kenner:

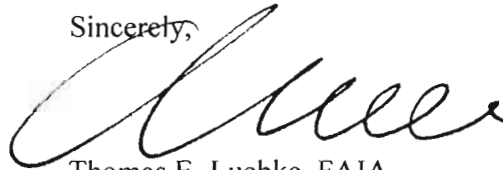
In its meeting of 20 September, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a proposal submitted by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development for public space elements of the Southwest Waterfront development, known as the District Wharf. These components are associated with Phase 2 of the development and include concept designs for small parks, as well as extensions of the Phase 1 designs for the Maine Avenue streetscape and the wharf promenade; this submission supplements the other Phase 2 public spaces reviewed in July 2017. The Commission approved the concept submission with the following comments.

The Commission members praised the design of the promenade's ground plane, especially the detailing and palette of granite paving, which they found creates a high-quality public space. In their discussion, they noted that the strength of the development's overall design concept lies in this continuous public space that serves as a consistent backdrop for a composition of distinctive individual buildings. They commented that some aspects of the proposed site design, such as the elimination of the second row of London plane trees in front of Water Building 1, erode this consistency and would undermine the coherence of the development, compromising the public's experience; they recommended eliminating these inconsistencies in the public space. In addition, in order to help balance the exuberant massings of the Phase 2 buildings, they recommended reassessing the tree canopy plan for the entire development, suggesting that its refinement could allow the individual buildings to retain their distinctiveness amid a broad and regular canopy. The Commission members also provided specific comments regarding the plantings for the two small parks: for the Grove, they suggested a mix of tree species, continuing the London plane trees used along the promenade in addition to the Kentucky coffee trees; for the Oculus, they suggested a denser planting pattern of river birch trees.

The Commission's consideration of the District Wharf in this meeting also included the review of three buildings in Phase 2, submitted as private-sector proposals in accordance with the Shipstead-Luce Act. For your reference, enclosed is the letter describing the review of these projects, including numerous comments on the desirability of coordinating the design of the buildings and open spaces of this extensive development.

The Commission looks forward to further review of this important project, and encourages continued coordination among the landscape and building designers. As always, the staff is available to assist you.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Brian T. Kenner
Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 317
Washington, DC 20004

Encl.: CFA letter of 29 September 2017 on Shipstead-Luce Act submissions at the District Wharf

cc: Shawn Seaman, Hoffman-Madison Waterfront
Hilary Bertsch, EEK/Perkins Eastman
Paul Josey, Wolf | Josey Landscape Architects
Faye Harwell, Rhodeside & Harwell

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Dear Mr. Seaman:

In its meeting of 20 September, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed concept proposals for three buildings in Phase 2 of the proposed Southwest Waterfront development known as the District Wharf: Water Building 1 (SL 17-167, 670 Maine Avenue, SW); Parcel 6/7 (SL 17-169, 660–680 Maine Avenue, SW); and Parcel 8 (17-168, 640 Maine Avenue, SW). The Commission took the following actions on the submissions and provided the following comments.

The Commission members reiterated their support for the District Wharf project and for the more imaginative approach to architectural design taken in Phase 2. They observed that the individual projects in Phase 2 do not follow the clarity of the 2012 master plan, which presented a stricter vision of how the building and site designs should relate, and established a strong street wall along both Maine Avenue and the wharf promenade. They cautioned that the Phase 2 buildings and public spaces may give a chaotic impression of having been designed with little awareness of how the individual projects contribute to an overall composition. In general, they recommended serious consideration of what holds the elements of the development together—whether building massing, materiality, retail frontage, or ground plane treatment—and closer coordination among design teams.

Water Building 1. The Commission members did not take an action on the concept for this project; they were unable to reach a consensus on the design, questioning the appropriate degree of expressiveness for the water buildings generally and requesting more information on how they will be perceived as an ensemble. They expressed support for a potential concept for the water buildings as a series of small, eccentric follies along a consistent promenade backdrop; however, this would require that the promenade and the buildings along it be largely consistent. For the proposed design of Water Building 1, they observed that the scale of the architectonic elements seems overbearing, particularly the truss and the evenly split bulkhead, and that the design seems too heavy-handed to achieve the intended playfulness. They recommended that the designers carefully choose which elements to emphasize, perhaps removing or lightening the truss and working with the wood character established by the bulkhead. They expressed support for an elegant, simple glass box, but observed that the project feels caged in and separated from the water by the heavy perimeter truss.

Parcel 6/7. The Commission members approved the concept for this building, characterizing it as handsome, and they commented that the design of the curtainwall is elegant and innovative. They also expressed appreciation for the high quality of the materials and detailing of the two-level retail base, which they said relates well to the waterfront setting and the adjacent Seventh Street Park, contributing to the creation of an attractive public space.

Parcel 8. The Commission members approved the concept for this building, composed of multiple staggered and ziggurat forms expressed in plan and section, observing that it

is challenging to develop a massing both distinctive and sympathetic to its surroundings within such a large development. However, they expressed concern about the degree of idiosyncrasy inherent in the design, commenting that a profusion of conspicuously eccentric buildings in close proximity results in a strange ensemble. They recommended further study of the projecting balconies for human habitation and comfort.

In conclusion, the Commission members strongly urged the development team to give more consideration to how these buildings and spaces will work together to create the vibrant, cohesive waterfront neighborhood envisioned in the master plan. They once again reiterated the fundamental importance of designing the buildings and public spaces so that the design of each informs the others, with more attention to the effect of design decisions for individual parcels on the District Wharf as a whole, with a more deliberate calibration of the balance between individually expressive projects and the consistent fabric that holds them together.

The Commission's review of the District Wharf in this meeting also included the public spaces associated with this part of the Phase 2 development, submitted for review by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. For your reference, the letter describing the review of these projects is enclosed.

The Commission looks forward to further review of the various components of the District Wharf development. In preparation for the next submission, please consult with the staff which, as always, is available to assist you.

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cc: Todd Shapiro, Hollwich Kushner Architecture
William Sharples, SHoP Architects
Christian Bailey, ODA
Jennifer Steingasser, D.C. Office of Planning
Melinda Bolling, D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs