

ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Recommendations and Comments Report

MEETING DATE: November 18, 2015

PROJECT: The Residences at 615 South Main
Project No. DR15-007

ADDRESS: 615 South Main Street

SUMMARY:

The Board felt that the development was marginally consistent with the applicable design guidelines, falling short in the areas of building modules/massing and building materials.

REPORT:

Boardmembers Burns (Chair), Mitchell, Kinley, Perkins, and Gibb-Randall were in attendance. Kinley recused himself from the discussion, citing a conflict of interest. Staff included Alexis DiLeo.

Brad Moore, architect, and Brant Stiles, developer, introduced themselves as the design team and described the proposed development at 615 South Main Street. Moore said an important design goal was to find a way to active the street.

Boardmembers asked about saving and reusing the façade of the original buggy factory. The design team explained it is not required and they simply wanted to do it. The internal structure is wood and is not salvageable, but the façade will be preserved in place. The existing aluminum storefront addition will also be removed.

Mitchell noted the design is inward-focused and with the new building across the street creates an “eye of the needle” viewscape at this gateway location. Moore agreed and felt that was another reason to keep the historic façade and provide a 10-foot front setback.

Mitchell also asked if other geometries were considered, such as a C or U-shaped building. He felt that the courtyard style was a literal and figurative cool design especially well suited to warm climates before air conditioning. The proposed development, however, lacks any views into the courtyard. Burns added that without knowledge of the courtyard, the development seemed too massive and uncomfortable. Other Boardmembers further commented about the massive appearance caused in part by the closed courtyard. Gibb-Randall inquired about a shade study, saying the pool may be in perpetual shade and encouraged opening the south end of the building to allow light into the courtyard.

Moore and Stiles offered to reconsider the design.

Burns appreciated the effort to break up the building's mass but felt the team was relying too much on material changes to do so. She commented one does not know where to look and recommended simplicity. She, and other boardmembers, did not think that every piece needed to be so varied, and would prefer to use massing to break up the lengthy façade rather than a changed in materials.

Gibb-Randall appreciated keeping the historic factory façade but felt it was not incorporated well into the overall design. She mentioned it seemed tacked on, was not cohesive, and the new portion was not informed by nor responded to its design. Perkins felt the current design made the historic factory façade an orphan and compared it to the new downtown hotel at 116 West Huron Street with the old bus depot façade. He was all for keeping the façade but felt it needs to be integrated and connected.

Mitchell returned to the building massing, wanting the massing broken with volume rather than materials. Burns wondered if there were further opportunities to add another story for better design since the proposed development was already anticipating planned project modifications.

Prepared by Alexis DiLeo, City Planner
January 20, 2015