

DESIGN REVIEW BOARD – SPECIAL HEARING

Design Review Board Case # 2021-0001
Block 23 – 2121 and 2111 Eisenhower Avenue

Application	General Data	
Project Name: Block 23 Location: Southern Portion of Block 23 – Eisenhower East/CDD #2 Applicant: Mid-Atlantic Realty Partners c/o Walsh, Colucci, Lubeley and Walsh, P.C.	DRB Date:	September 16 th , 2021
	Site Area:	1.89-Acres
	Existing Zone:	CDD #2
	Proposed Zone:	CDD #2
	Existing Use:	Office (x2)
	Proposed Use:	Multi-Family Residential
	Gross Floor Area:	488,880 square feet
Purpose of Application: Architectural review for the redevelopment of the southern portion of Block 23.		

Staff Reviewers: Robert M. Kerns, AICP robert.kerns@alexandriava.gov
Thomas H. Canfield, AIA tom.canfield@alexandriava.gov
Nathan Imm Nathan.imm@alexandriava.gov
Carson C. Lucarelli carson.lucarelli@alexandriava.gov

DRB HEARING FOR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN REVIEW, SEPT. 16TH, 2021:

Following a brief presentation by the Applicant's Architect, the Board voted to endorse the architectural submission package for Block 23.

Mr. Quill appreciated the "*sophisticated*" and "*high-quality*" design but called for attention to the pedestrian experience along all three streets including but not limited to the lobbies and mid-rise portion of the building. They also requested more information on the interim condition of the Phase #1 façade and for improved renderings which accentuated the space and function of the streetscapes.

Mr. Lewis was also very pleased with the "*transformation*" of the design and agreed with Mr. Quill that the pedestrian level required more attention and finessing – as well as Staff's recommendation to introduce more color or something "*eye*" catching for the mid-rise connector piece. Specifically, adding an additional architectural layer to the façade to improve the human experience and to make the more residential portion of the building read more intimately. They also expressed concern about the renderings, which did not have enough lighting.

Mr. Canfield, City Architect, echoed many of the sentiments shared above. They also agreed with Mr. Lewis's concerns about the renderings and emphasized Staff's position regarding introducing more color – particularly at the "*human*" scale and "*lobby*."

As the citizen-appointee, Mr. Lynch acknowledged that changes in the massing were positive. They also shared their fellow board members concerns about the pedestrian experience along the abutting streets.

The Board voted 4-0 (Del Pepper Absent) to **APPROVE** the architectural submission package.

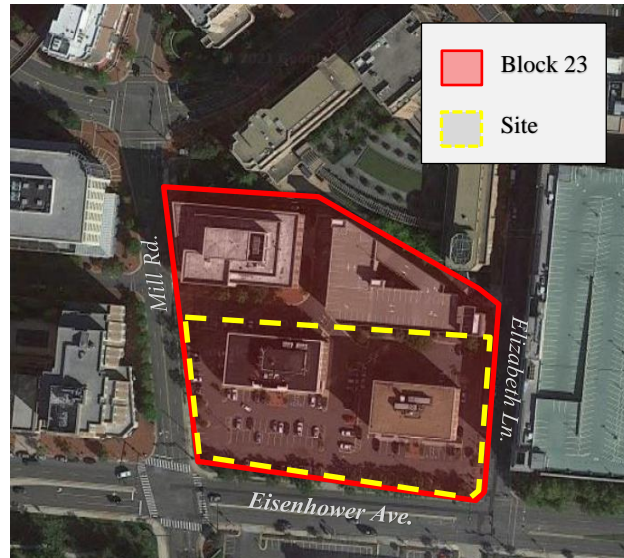
DRB SPECIAL HEARING FOR CONCEPTUAL DESIGN REVIEW, JUNE 17TH, 2021:

The Board's comments followed a presentation by Applicant on the conceptual massing, form and expression of the project, as proposed. The Board agreed with the overall changes to the massing strategy based on Staff's recommendation. They however emphasized that the Applicant should work to simplify the façade systems, particularly for the first phase, and suggested introducing secondary and tertiary expressions. The Board also expressed simplification of the block in its entirety and for less brutal facades along the new east/west service road in the rear. The Board supported bringing the tower architecture to the pedestrian realm as well as improving connections to the active "people functions" beginning on the ground level. The Board also desired more activated roof/terrace level space, given the grandeur and scale of the project. The Applicant's Attorney concurred and clarified that these design details (i.e., related to roof-level activation) were actively being considered. The Board also emphasized the need for heightened attention to detail at the pedestrian scale while simplifying the overall façade expressions. The concept submission was approved as regards mass, height, scale and general architectural character unanimously (5-0) by the board subject to exploring the recommendations outlined in the Staff Report.

I. Block 23 – DRB Architectural Review

Background

Block 23 is a development site located in Eisenhower East that is bounded by Eisenhower Avenue to the south, Mill Road to the west, Elizabeth Lane to the east, and the Albert V. Brian United States Federal Courthouse and parking garage, as well as a small office building constructed in 2010 to the north. There is a serpentine service road which bisects the block from east to west, creating an alley-like condition in between the northern portion of the block, and the subject site to the south. This southern portion of the block, highlighted in yellow above, is the location of the project site.



The portion of the block north of the existing service road is known as Eisenhower Center III and was developed under DSUP#20004-0041. It is improved by an office building, a free-standing parking garage and various site improvements which are adjacent to, and serve, the Federal Courthouse.

The subject site highlighted above in yellow is 4 blocks east of the Eisenhower Metro Station and improved by two medical-office buildings (circa 1984) which are set back

entrance at each end of the building, which is in keeping with the project's phased approach. The entrances provide access to the vertical garage –which has one level fully below grade. The garage which has storage capacity for 664 vehicles and an undetermined number of bicycles. The garage portion constructed under Phase #1 will include knock-out panels for connection to the anticipated of the second phase.

The EESAP requires one level of parking below grade, which the Applicant provided following the first concept plan submission. Since the Applicant's concept submission, an entire floor of parking has been removed from the top level of the podium, given market changes in anticipated demand for off-street car storage. This has further improved the proportions of the proposed massing.

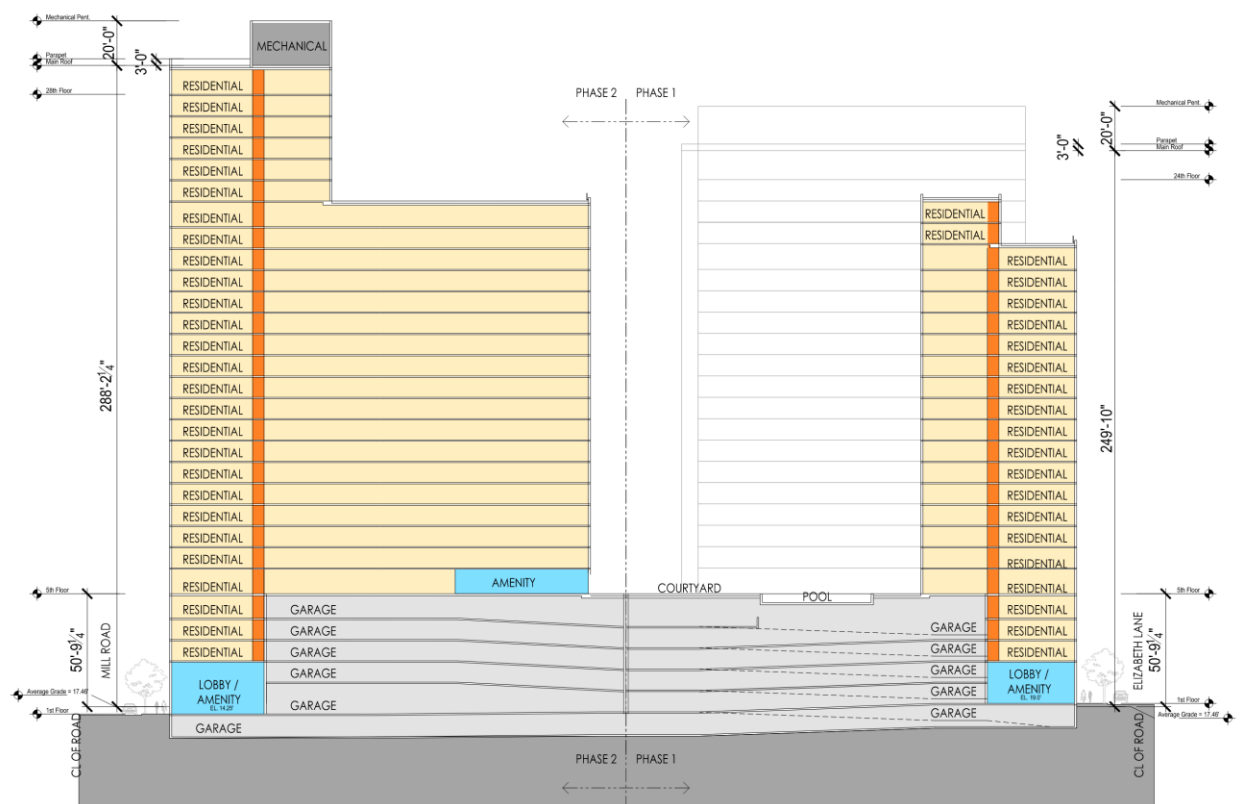


Figure Above: Current Cross-Section

The proposal also includes a new east/west roadway connection, or “C-Street,” which is identified in the SAP. The new roadway will provide access to the garage and will be built to city standards – including but not limited to sidewalks ranging from 6-17’, a mid-block crossing, narrow travel lanes, and related curb-work adjacent to the parking garage associated with Eisenhower Center III to the north. The remaining streets which surround the site (Mill, Elizabeth and Eisenhower) will have new sidewalk widths ranging from 14 to 25-feet (curb to building), and are consistent with the recommendation from the EESAP. It should be noted that the majority of the pedestrian improvements along Eisenhower Avenue will be completed by VDOT, as a part of the Eisenhower Avenue

reconstruction, currently underway.

- *Eisenhower East Design Guidelines*

The project is located in the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan (EESAP) and will therefore need to comply with the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines. It should be noted that the Design Guidelines are currently being reviewed and discussed by the City for an update in the near future.

Notable design principals from the current plan include:

- Structured parking façades shall be in architectural harmony with the overall building design
- Parking levels facing A or B streets shall be fully screened with active uses
- Use of high-quality materials
- Pronounced and easily identifiable entryways with canopies
- Articulation of top, body, and base

- *Design Evolution to Date*

The first concept discussed with Staff incorporated two parallel towers, each with its primary mass oriented north-south and perpendicular to Eisenhower Avenue, with a secondary wing at ninety degrees, parallel to Eisenhower. Staff felt that this resulted in a “twin towers” or “bookends” effect, did not reflect an appropriate level of distinction between the two phases, and was also too similar to the parallelism already present in the Paradigm development to the immediate west of the project site and as recently approved for the first two phases of Block 32.

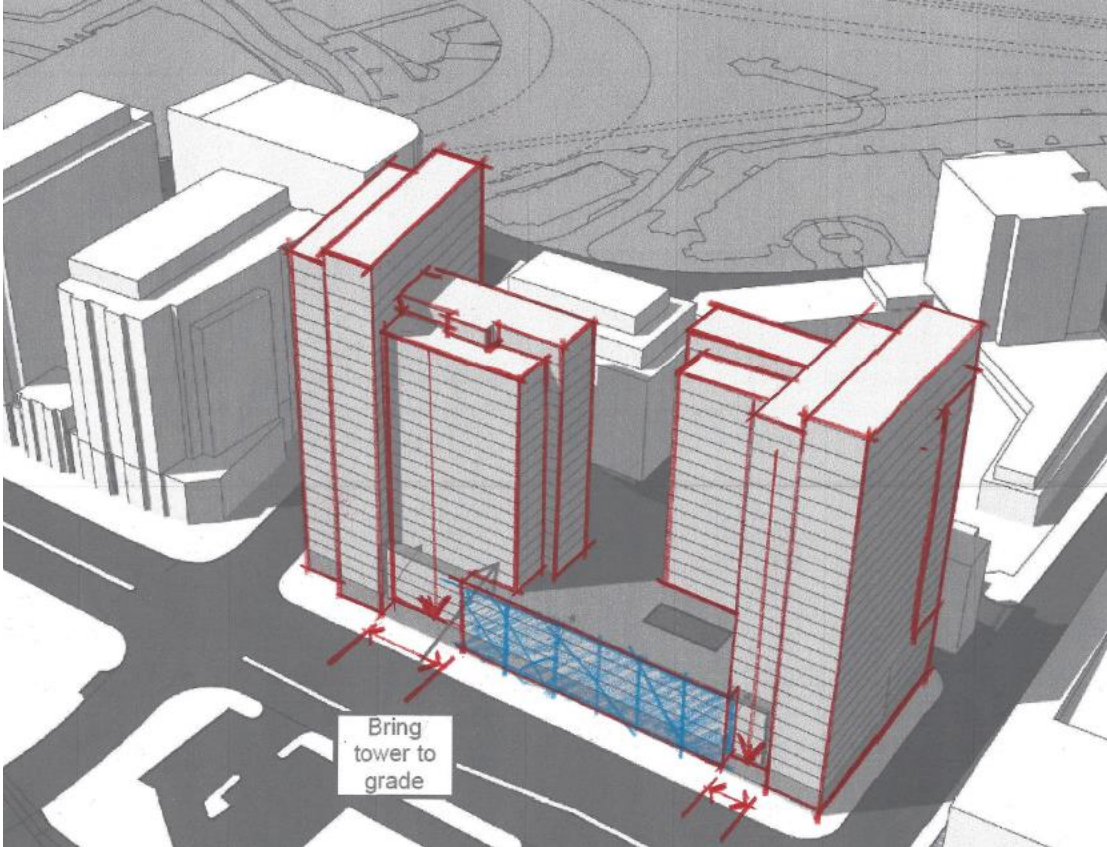


Figure Above: Applicant's initial massing proposal, showing parallel tall sections aligned N-S, with City staff markup.

Staff encouraged the Applicant's design team to explore placing the buildings in a rotated relationship, to create a richer combination of forms – specifically, to let the dominant bar of one remain oriented north-south, while flipping the dominant bar of the other tower to an east-west alignment. Staff further encouraged applicant to develop strongly differentiated skin treatments for each tower, to carry tower architecture all the way to the ground wherever possible, and to use the portion of the screened garage that fronts on Eisenhower Avenue to create an element that reads as strongly different from the two towers (for example, horizontal in emphasis, and possibly much more glassy in terms of cladding) with the goal of further emphasizing the dramatic height of the two new residential towers.

With this submission, the massing of the two L-Shaped towers has been spread further apart and the podium itself has lost an entire floor and the height of each phase has been further differentiated. The Applicant has also refined the arrangement of the balconies specifically with Phase #2, to create a more rhythmic expression above Eisenhower. In addition, the lobby entrances of both phases, which hug Mill and Elizabeth Lanes respectively, have also received significant facelifts. Along Elizabeth, there is now a recessed entryway to help reveal the accentuated height of the ground floor. Along both side streets, the architecture of each lobby has been improved at the pedestrian level through full height structural glass and a strong row of columns. By departing from the

residential expression above, these changes help to accentuate the separate programmatic uses in the building and better celebrate the public realm.



Figure Above: Lobby Entrance on Eisenhower at Elizabeth.



Figure Above: Lobby Entrance at Mill and Eisenhower



Figure Above: Block 23 as proposed

a. Staff Analysis and Recommendation – Current Proposal

The three-dimensional design, as it has evolved, establishes a strong dialogue with the contemporary massing of the Paradigm residential tower on Block 19, which it faces across the major Eisenhower-Mill Road intersection. The massing has been recently adjusted to allow for a much greater difference in height between the two towers, as reviewed at the previous DRB hearing. Achieving variety of heights has been a long-term goal for staff and the DRB, and this is the first project to be able to take advantage of language in the updated SAP to do so. An additional benefit of this massing improvement is the opening-up of the space between the two buildings – which further enhances access to light and the view to the Simpson-developed Eisenhower Center III office building to the immediate north. When seen from above, the geometry of the two towers is reinforced by the surrounding built environment – orthogonal along Eisenhower, and diagonal along Mill Road.

II. Architectural Comments

While the above developments are all very positive, staff directs the DRB to the following areas in which there is room for improvement and further study:

- a. Form and Coloration*
- b. Site Design*
- c. Façade Systems*
- d. Green Building Design Considerations*
- e. Railings and Other Specific Elements*
- f. Other Suggested Changes and Improvements*

a. Form and Coloration

While the overall composition and massing are strong and have continued to evolve, staff feels that the current color scheme is overly severe and understated and recommends that the applicant team explore the judicious addition of color to introduce a sense of life and activity back into what is a residential community, and not a workplace. Whether this is accomplished in the materials of the primary tower frames, as in **Attachments C - G** below, and/or vis-à-vis accent colors in elements such as balconies and balcony rails or solar shading devices or mullions, is up to the design team and further review, but the project would benefit from some additional warmth and life. As in the examples below, achieving this kind of warmth does not imply a return to brick, since the examples shown accomplished that goal vis-à-vis terracotta and natural copper; precast concrete, with tinting or integral tile facing, offers many other opportunities to fine-tune a color scheme, as do metal finishes.

b. Site Design

The building design has seen significant evolution since the last review. The language of the tower facades has been developed in such a way that the two towers appear clearly related, and yet not “twinning” – not only in their specific three-dimensional massing, but also in the variety of ways in which their sub-component fabrics are assembled and juxtaposed. The use of multi-story openings has been further developed, which, together with the underlying massing, contributes to a powerful sense of verticality. Within these openings, there has been significant refinement of glazing subdivision, leading towards a consistent use of dynamic asymmetry. Although discussed at the previous DRB hearing and in work sessions with staff since, there does not appear to have been any meaningful study of passive solar strategy, such as shading devices, or other green building initiatives.

c. Façade Systems

The façade treatment of the exposed podium along the Service Road (“C Street”) still appears awkward, as seen in Sheets A-321 and A-322, due to both the form and material use. In the context of the crisply geometric expression of the remainder of the project, the slight angular fold of the wall seems weak, and there is also a missed opportunity for the introduction of more glass. Staff suggests eroding the portion of the podium façade east of the bicycle rooms on the upper garage levels to create a stepped façade more in keeping with the tower massing, and also to incorporate more glass into the bicycle areas.

Clarification on pedestrian access to the related ground level areas along the C Street is also necessary. Refer to diagram in **Attachment A**.

Another area that staff feels needs additional refinement is the open-work screening element that wraps around selected balcony areas on the Phase #1 tower. As noted in the balcony rail comments above, Staff feel that to be successful, this screen work needs to project an image of quality, detail and uniqueness, and encourages the applicant to find a solution more akin to the open work on 2100 L Street, shown in **Attachments H-J**, than to some sort of standard perforated metal product. The visual appearance and detailing of this element are critical, given its visual prominence. The design logic of this component has been enhanced by the technique of creating returns to the primary façade at alternating rows, implying a more structural character, but its design and material will remain critical elements.

d. Green Building Design Considerations

As mentioned above, Staff would like to see an investigation of passive and/or active solar strategies to reduce the heating and cooling loads on this project, which incorporates significant glazed areas. A suggestion in this regard would be to look at the use of horizontal fixed shading fins on south-facing glass (located above eye height, but below the top of glazed areas) and vertical shading fins on east- and west-facing glass (ideally, located on the asymmetrical vertical mullions). In addition to producing measurable savings in heating and cooling loads, these elements could be used (with or without color – see below) to add a secondary or tertiary level of detail to the rather severe facades (see **Attachment B** – color added for clarity only). Staff continue to implore the Applicant to study integration of photovoltaics into the building architecture, which could work in concert with the foregoing recommendations regarding vertical/horizontal fins.

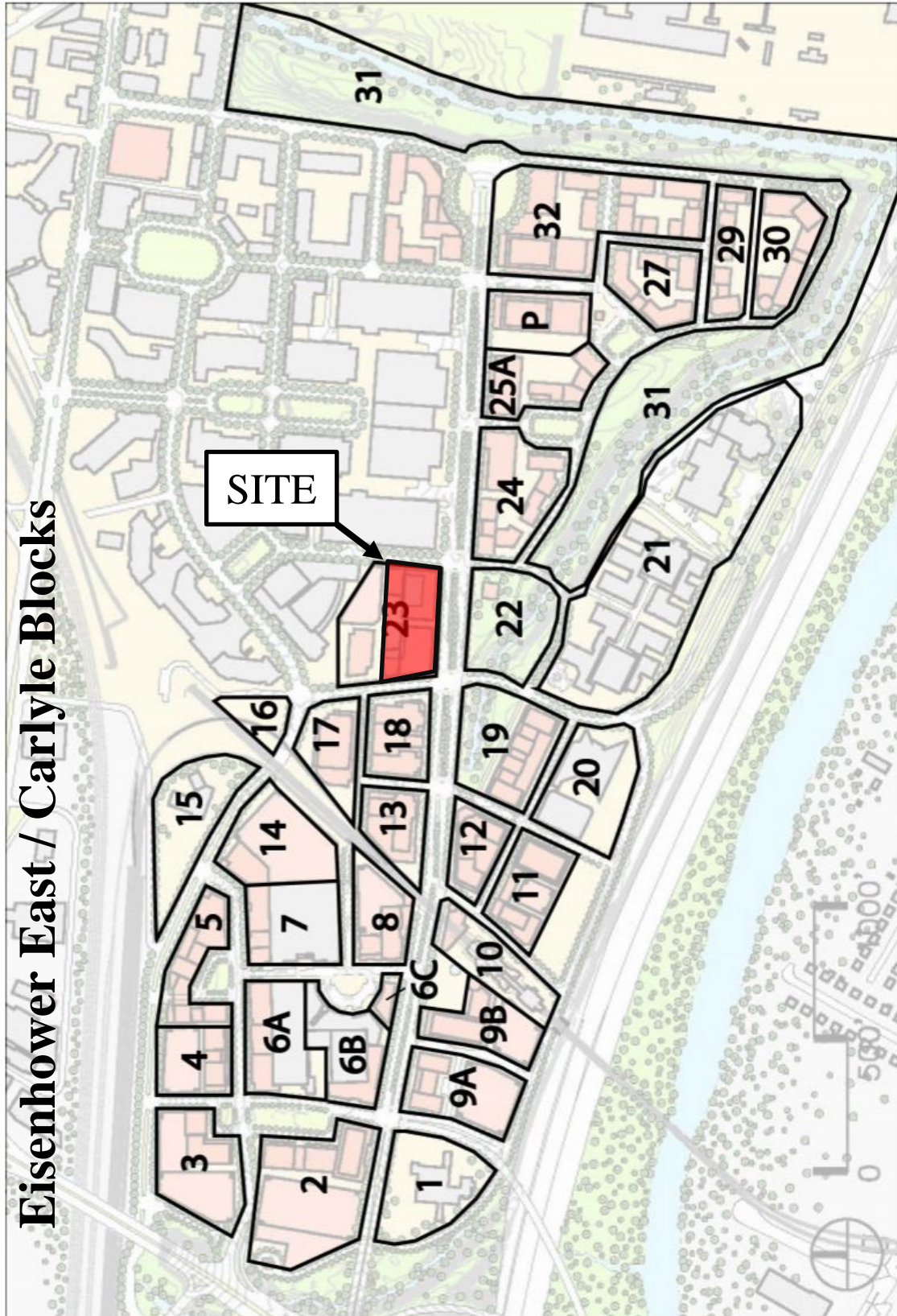
e. Railings and Other Specific Elements

While staff appreciates that significantly more detail has been shown in balcony railings where they are proposed, the universal use of a simple vertical picket design (as seen on Sheets A-316, 317, 318, 504) makes these potentially strong design elements appear generic. Since the project has been divided not only into two separate towers, but those towers in turn subdivided into strongly differentiated components, staff suggests developing a series of related but special and distinct railing types, to be used in a coordinated way in conjunction with different façade, material or orientation conditions, with a clear rationale for which rail designs are used where.

The podium façade expression along Eisenhower has been well developed, as discussed previously, with alternating solid and glassy sections, and a well-defined ground level distinction between public and private zones. While the heavier masonry expression for the five low “towers” seems appropriate – in fact, they might even want to feel even more substantial – the glass areas separating them seem a little busy. This might be addressed by using a slightly wider spacing between a smaller number of vertical fins, while at the

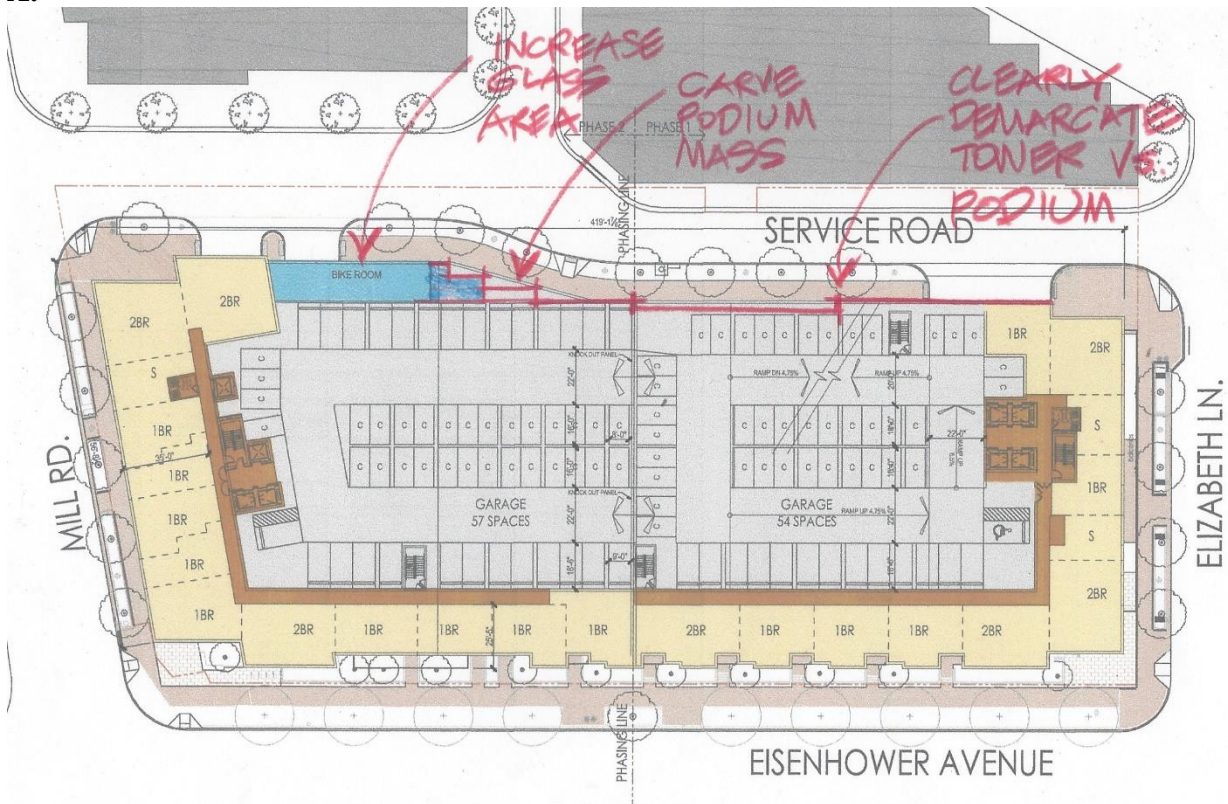
same time making those fins deeper and more intentional looking (as rendered currently, they look more like simple additive vertical mullions).

Eisenhower East / Carlyle Blocks

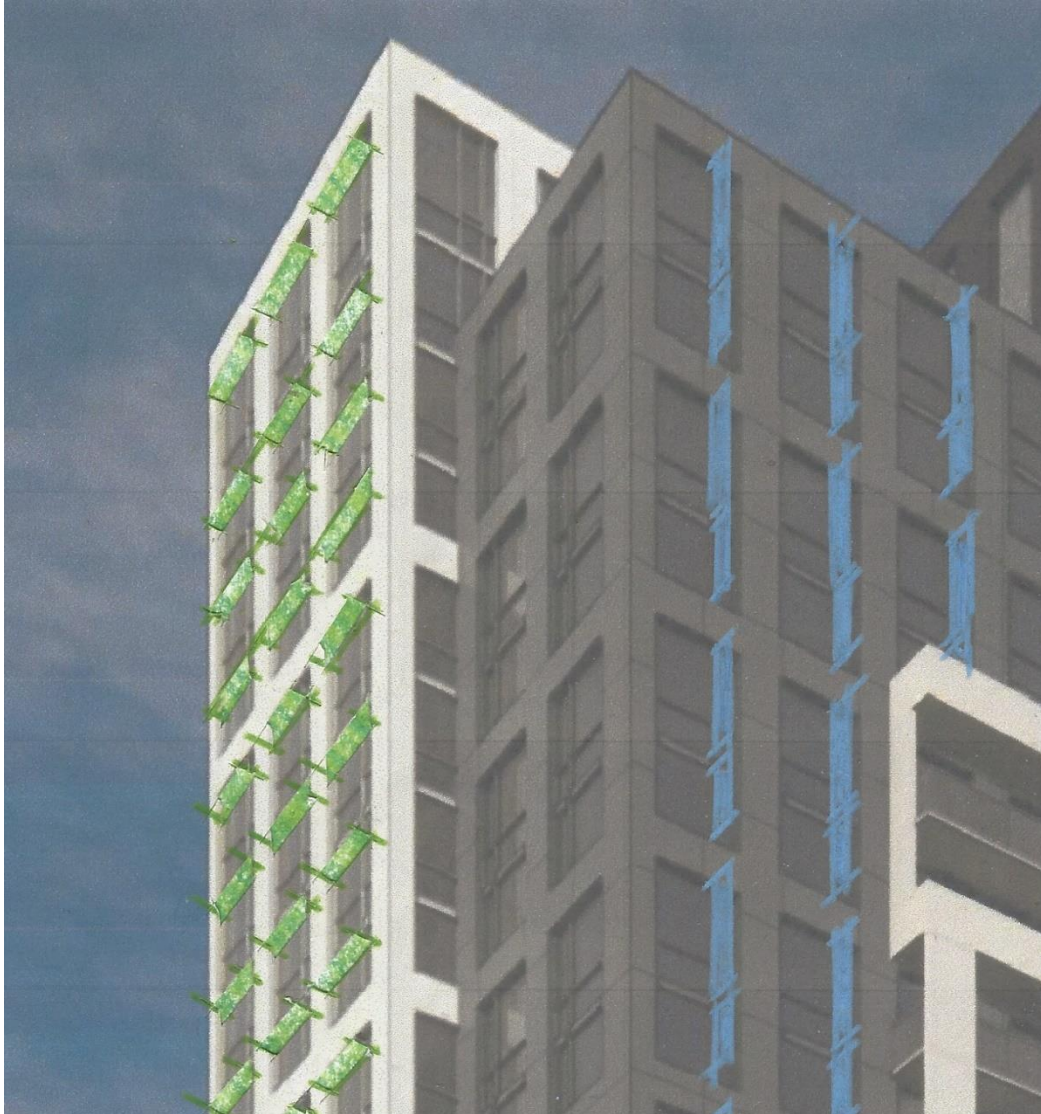


Attachments

A.



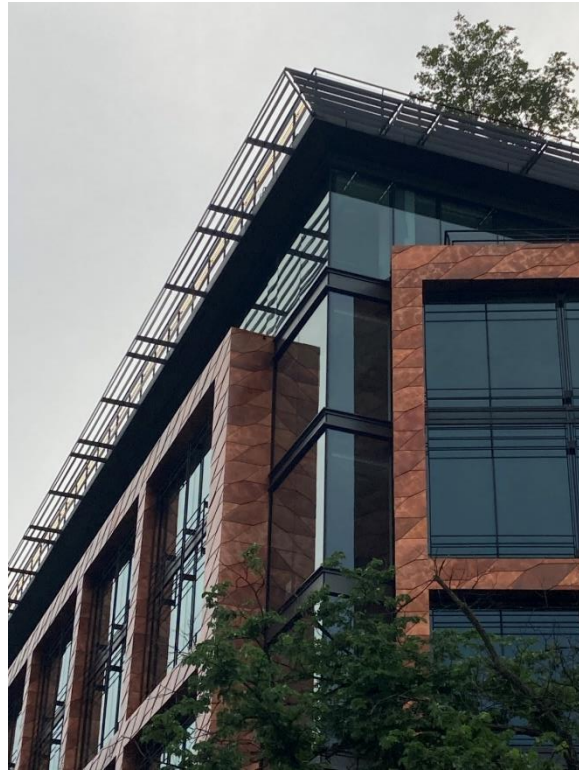
B.



C & D.



E, F, & G.



H, I, & J.

