

OLD GOUCHER

in charles village



Urban Design and Architectural Review Panel
Baltimore City Department of Planning
417 E. Fayette Street, 8th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

Attention: Anthony Cataldo

October 9, 2013

Dear Mr. Cataldo & the Review Panel:

This statement is on behalf of Old Goucher responding to the proposed design changes to the 25th Street Station project. As we have noted, the rushed review and revision schedule has not given us the time to gather full community input, but the following comments are reflective of the feedback that we have received to date. As more notes come in, we will continue to share them with UDARP.

The overwhelming community consensus is that the revised designs feel “suburban,” “cheap,” “not nice for those of us who walk,” “unfriendly,” and “not what we were promised” (to quote a few residents at the community meeting on the 7th). In fact not a single community member has come forward with a positive response to the design. These revised designs are a giant departure from what was originally approved, and they are a huge step backwards in terms of both aesthetics and urbanism.

Many community members are extremely upset at what they perceive as an attempt by the developer to win community approval with one design, while building something quite different.

This project can be an opportunity to show what a well-integrated, well-designed big-box development can be in Baltimore. It sets a precedent for similar projects that will certainly come in the future. It is our collective choice whether this project sets good precedents for design and good precedents for the community review process—precedents that will help make Baltimore a vibrant 21st-century city.

Sincerely,

Bruce Willen and Philip Lacombe
on behalf of the Old Goucher Community Association and Old Goucher Business Alliance

Jeanne Knight
President, Old Goucher Community Association

Ken Abrams
President, Old Goucher Business Alliance

Specific Feedback and Recommendations

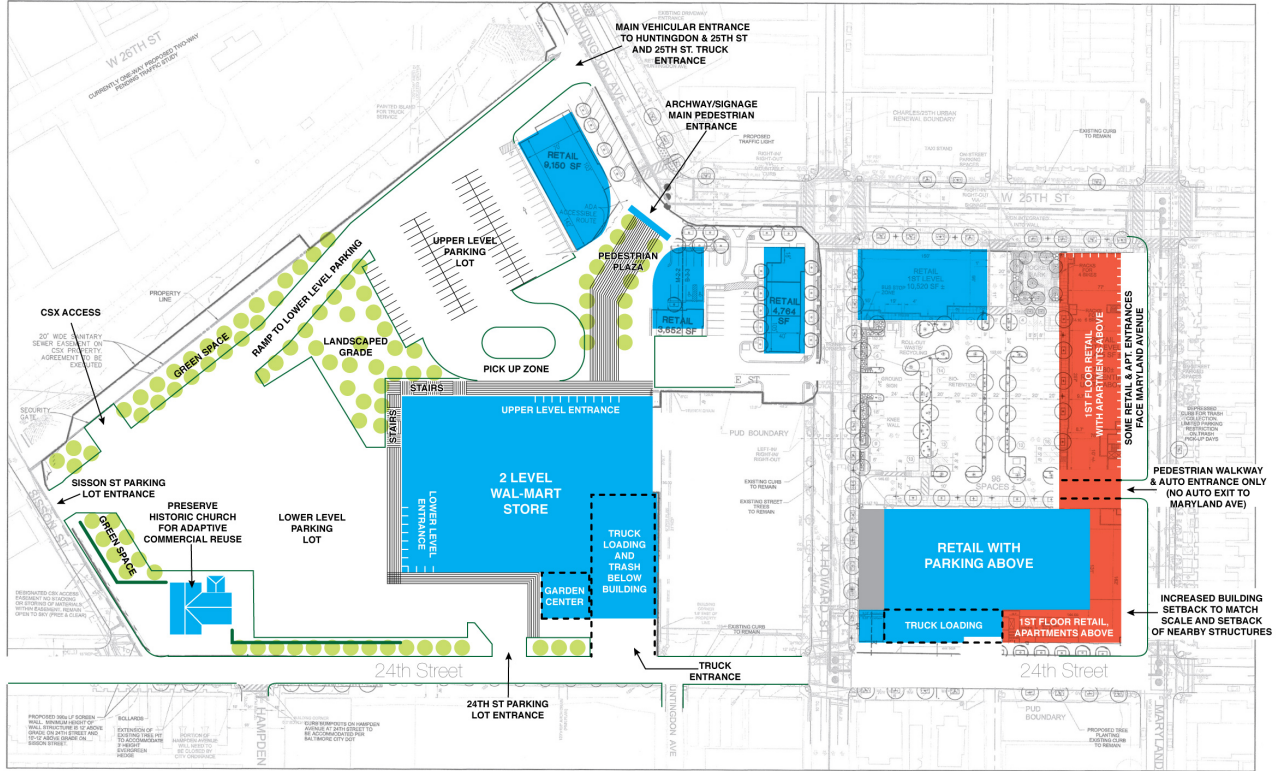
Based on community feedback, we recommend specific design changes that will help address neighborhood concerns and will improve the project's design:

- **The design must be more urban** and reflect the scale and quality of architecture in Old Goucher.
- **Aesthetically, the new designs are appalling.** The building looks ugly, uninviting, suburban, and generic.
- **We request a high quality architectural design** that is welcoming, attractive, and fits in better with the great architecture in our neighborhood. As an example, we have included designs of new Walmart stores in Washington DC designed by *these very same architects*.
- **A two-story Walmart store** (or a single story store with parking below or above) would be a more urban design approach. The idea of a multi-level building was received very favorably by Old Goucher and Remington residents.
- **The revised designs should actively engage the street, neighborhood, and pedestrians.** These are neighborhoods of walkers, and a car-centric design only serves half of the shoppers of this complex.
- **A reorientation of the Walmart building and entrances** could make the building easier to access for pedestrians, most of whom will be coming from 25th Street. Pedestrians should not be forced to walk through a large parking lot or down a long, ugly, and uninviting path and staircase. (see Resident-Friendly Site plan)
- **Improve pedestrian safety and experience** by placing access points closer to the neighborhood and having short, protected, and attractive walkways between the street and all building entrances.
- **Move vehicular entrances away from the historic Fawcett neighborhood.** 24th St. entrance should be further east. Add a Sisson St. entrance so that Sisson St. traffic can access site without driving through Fawcett.
- **Remove vehicular entrance and intersection at 25th and Huntingdon** to reduce traffic congestion and create more inviting street edge and pedestrian entrance. Move this vehicular entrance and intersection to north edge of project on Huntingdon. (see Resident-Friendly Site plan)
- **Create a stronger street edge at 25th Street** for better neighborhood integration. Changing the 25th and Huntingdon intersection to a pedestrian entrance would also allow for a built entrance at this location (archway, signage, etc)
- **Move truck loading areas and truck entrances** as far away as possible from residents on 24th Street. Reorienting the Walmart building could allow for loading areas in the southeast corner of the site.
- **Preserve the historic Royers Chapel at 24th and Sisson** for adaptive reuse. The project is 55% smaller, so there is certainly no reason to destroy the chapel for a parking lot. Could be converted into offices, a restaurant, or even a Walmart garden center.
- **Stormwater issues and run-off issues *must* be addressed.**
- **Additional green space** should be added throughout the site. The reduction in project size would allow for ample greening and landscaping.
- **Landscaping water and sprinkler access** should be incorporated so that trees and greenery will be properly cared for throughout the project.

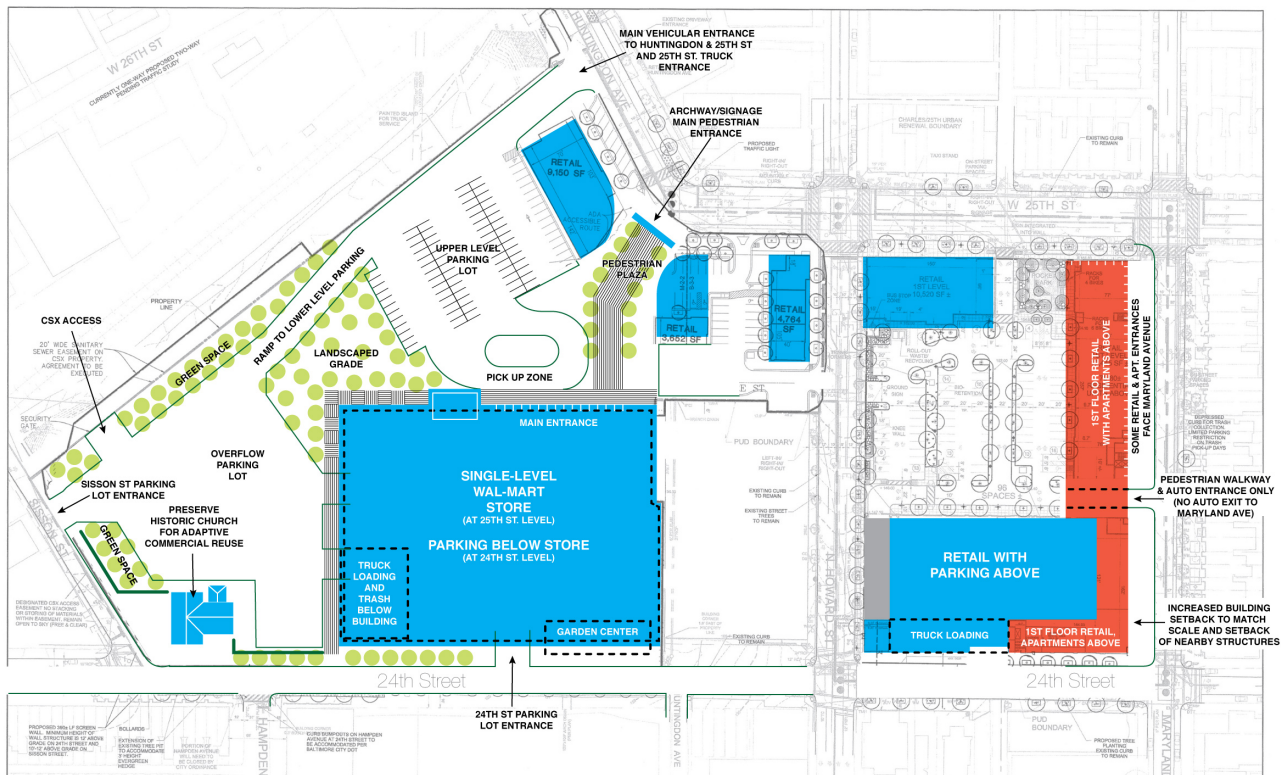
Example Resident-Friendly Site Plans

These sketches for revised site plans are a quick exercise, demonstrating that resident's priorities and the developer's original promised could be accommodated with a little bit of creativity.

25th Street Station, Resident-Friendly Site Plan 2



25th Street Station, Resident-Friendly Site Plan 1

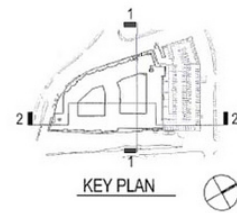
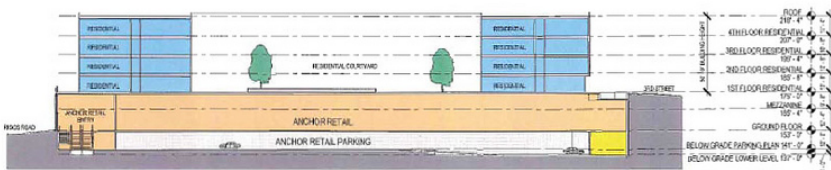


New Washington, DC Walmarts designed by MMA Architects

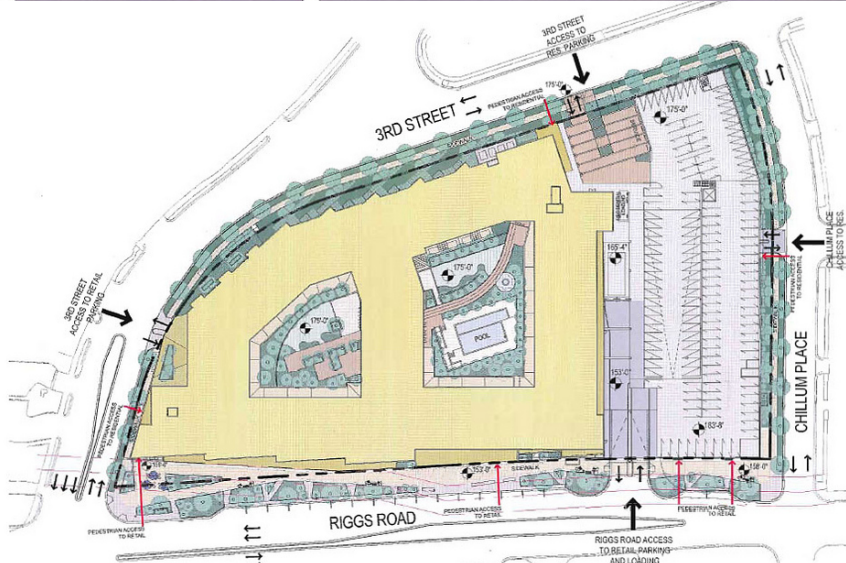
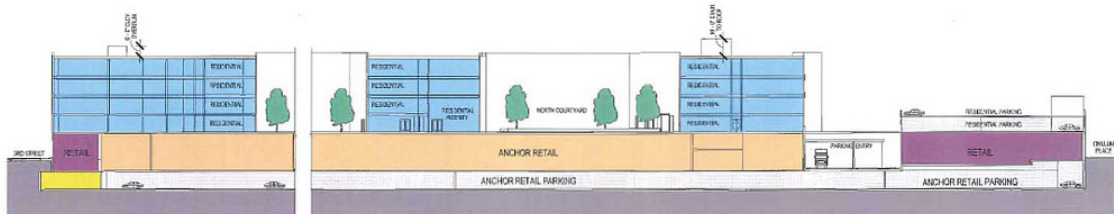
The new Walmarts in DC all are significantly better designs than the proposed 25th Street Station Walmart. The Georgia Ave. and Fort Totten sites are most demographically and geographically similar to our neighborhoods. We present these renderings to show that *Walmart and this architect are capable of doing much better. Why are they not doing so in Baltimore?*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dUf2Sa6dY>





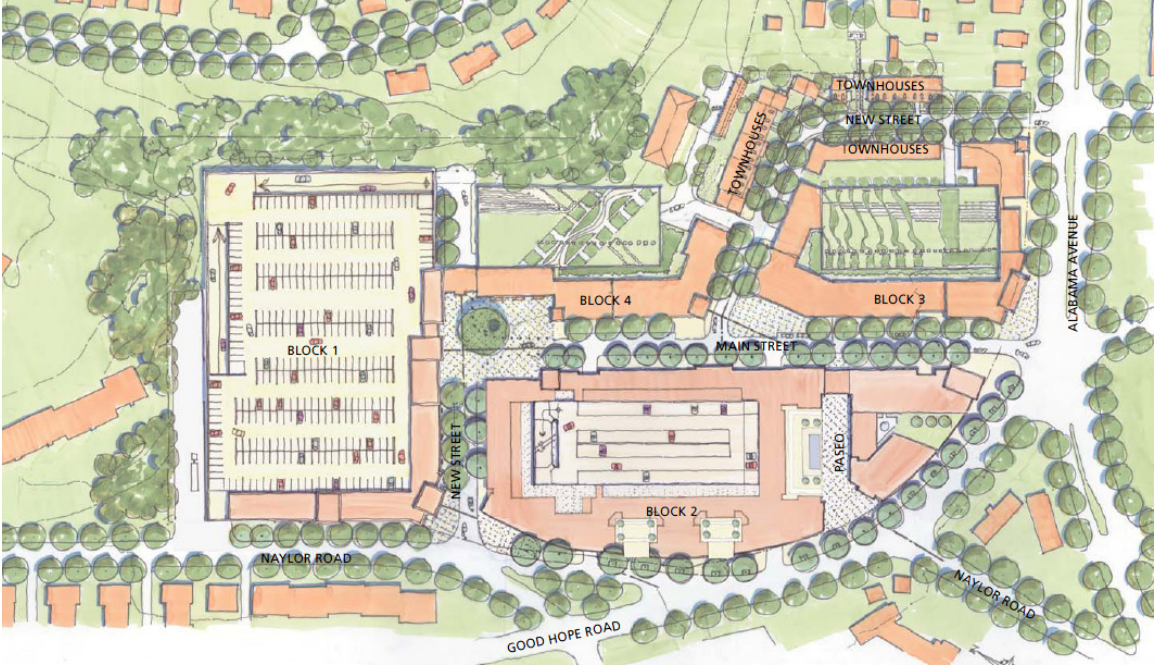
1 SECTION - EASTWEST
1" = 48'-0"



SITE / CIRCULATION PLAN

(For illustrative purposes only)

Skyland Town Center



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGTCn9drhVE>

1st & H St (Gonzaga)



Resident Comments & Feedback

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I don't have much to say that hasn't already been said but I basically agree with a lot of it: I live on 25th and Howard and aside from the unpleasant look I simply don't see myself crossing the parking lot to shop there. **These type of designs create mental barriers in how people perceive them and this design sends the message that despite what we've been told, this shopping center is not for the neighborhoods.** The walls are going to create unsafe-feeling areas that I will avoid walking by.

I think that they try to feed us ideas of landscaping.. trees, planter boxes (aka glorified trash cans) but when put in reality the things look quite different once subjected to the elements and the litterbugs and the vehicle damage that will inevitably come. **Trees enhance Old Goucher because we have beautiful architecture and we have good neighbors to maintain them and keep trash in check. But they won't have the same impact when the thing they're gilding is unsightly in the first place.**

Kara MH

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It doesn't seem like the same project they got approval for a few years ago.

Chris Brooks

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After attending last week's UDARP meeting on the proposed revisions to the 25th Street Station plan, I was very dismayed. **This development is a chance for central Baltimore to move forward, but low density car-centric development like this is is sadly backward-looking. This is a densely populated area, and new developments here should be oriented to pedestrians and cyclists.**

There is an irony in the fact that this project is justified in part by Wal-Mart's ability to meet the shopping needs of our low income neighbors, but yet the proposal is to build it in a way that alienates anyone not arriving in a car--ie, our low income neighbors.

John David Evans

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Better quality architecture will result in higher income for this developer so I'm not sure why they wouldn't want to put forth some effort.

More importantly to me, a large development can assist in this neighborhood's renaissance, increasing the tax base, beautifying the streets and improving the quality of life. Or a large development, like the shopping center at Maryland and 21st, can attract crime, struggle to attract tenants, be a blight in the neighborhood, and prevent the neighborhood from flourishing.

Sarah Templin

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My thought when Walmart said they were putting the garden center on that side was to save and renovate and make [Royers Chapel] part of the garden center.

How cool would it be to go into the stone building to get your plants and accessories. Sort of like Valley View Farms Nursery. Much classier than your normal walmart.

Betsy Anthony-Childs

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the process shouldn't only weigh the changes to the plan itself as if this development existed in a vacuum, but should also take into account the context in which it fits.

even if no revisions were being made to the plan itself, 3 and a half years have passed and major demographic trends, for our neighborhood, for our city, and for american cities at large have made themselves more apparent during that time. people are moving back to cities across the nation, and they are seeking out dense, walkable, urban areas. baltimore itself saw a small net gain in population last year for the first time in decades. the station north arts district is blossoming and there is talk of enlarging its borders such that it abuts this project directly. seawall is blazing a trail of walkable, human-scaled redevelopment in remington. people are driving less in general, and more people are eschewing car ownership entirely, even those who are not forced to for economic reasons. improvements to alternative transportation options in the immediate vicinity are in the pipeline for the short term (circulator expansion, real-time bus arrival info, bikeshare, maryland avenue cycletrack) as well as for a more theoretical long term (charles street trolley or some other rail transportation on the charles street corridor, MARC service on the CSX belt line) that will partially obviate the need for so much parking and such an automobile-focused layout.

at this point in history, it seems to me that it is in the city's best interests to discourage the type of development design we've been fed here without the community even having to put up this kind of fight, if we want to continue to build on the progress we've been making and catch up with a washington, dc that is now larger than baltimore for the first time in history and can get high quality development like the plans phillip showed for georgia avenue.

Christopher Nelson

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Originally, this is what was stated about this project (<http://www.25thstreetstation.com/TheProject.html>):

Urban Design Approach

The project's overarching design principle is to create an urban mixed-use complex that is compatible with the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhoods and takes advantage of the unusual topography of the site, permitting multi-level construction. The development will utilize sustainable design principles creating a pedestrian friendly, lively environment for the community.

The proposed doesn't seem compatible with the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood nor does it seem to do anything to create a pedestrian friendly lively environment for the community....quite the opposite in my opinion. Looks like any other suburban development.

It's a shame that this type of development is going into/near an historic neighborhood that is experiencing a renaissance. Other development IS happening here and IT is in keeping with our character. It is not an impossible task.

I'm not sure that writing to you has any impact at all but am doing so in the hopes that I am wrong on this count. I am not an urban planner nor do I have any credentials in the field, I only know what I see and this project looks terrible and will not only NOT be beneficial to our neighborhood but will be detrimental.

Thank you for your attention. Let me know if there is ANY way that I can affect how this project moves forward.

Kris Northrup

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We are excited by the arrival in the past three years of new residents and businesses, who could have chosen other neighborhoods. And we are worried that a quick build of a substandard Walmart, at the lowest end of any design standards, will reverse our forward momentum.

The proposed changes are problematic on many fronts and they aren't minor. Changing entrances, exits, traffic flow and truck routes is not minor. Changing the square footage and number of parking spaces up OR down is not minor. These are not superficial changes. They are major ones. Major enough to damage our neighborhood. Major enough to make the City look bad for allowing it to happen when it doesn't have to.

The City will get its Walmart. And the developer and Walmart will make their money. They are not going to leave the project if these proposed changes are deemed a Major Amendment. If a delay in their schedule was that detrimental to them, they would have already abandoned the project. But, they are still here.

This is an opportunity for all of us to make the project more successful, than it will be if these proposed changes are allowed to be rammed through as a Minor Amendment. Washington, D.C. has pushed developers and Walmart for better, more appropriately urban developments and it has gotten them. Why wouldn't Baltimore do the same?

Cathy Yates

With big box retailers poised to continue expanding their operations into city centers, even as cities gain in population and development due to the urban qualities that are increasingly attracting new residents of all demographics and generations, **there is a fantastic opportunity for cities like ours to show how this type of center can be adapted to reflect the qualities that make cities like Baltimore special places to live.**

With proper design and collaboration, this center could be a iconic success for the developer, a major milestone for a large retailer like Walmart, a boon to the city and an asset for the surrounding neighborhoods and communities. It could be the type of project that catalyzes growth throughout the area and becomes an example for other cities about what can be accomplished when communities, corporations and developers work together for the benefit of all.

Or it could be the opposite of that. A detriment to a vital area of the city. A costly failure for the retailer. A black eye for the development team. And a source of ongoing embarrassment for the city and the current administration.

A little time can make a lot of difference. With what is at stake, the desire to revisit the project as a major amendment to the PUD is a modest proposal to make for the benefit all parties involved. Lets not squander this opportunity.

Jay Orr
ARQ Architects
Old Goucher Business Alliance

** We reiterate here the lack of time given to compile community input. We expect that many more residents would contribute with a proper comments period.*