



PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

October 19, 2021

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Executive Director
Brent Runyon

Mr. Robert C. Davis, Chair
The I-195 District Commission
Via Email

Re: Parcel 2

Dear Bob:

The Providence Preservation Society's Planning & Architectural Review Committee (PAR) invited all three prospective development teams for Parcel 2 to present their proposals on October 6th. We carefully reviewed all three plans and sent individual comment letters to each team. Below is a summary of our comments, in the order of review.

Eden Properties

- Overall, we found the design visually overstimulated. The effort to break up the massing results in a mass that is difficult to read, and the design itself needs editing.
- The proposal turns its back on S. Main Street, treating it like a service corridor. We prefer to see an approach that encourages neighborhood and retail district activity and reintroduces a safer, human-scale at the southern end.
- With thoughtfulness in the aesthetics and experience of the center plaza, it would be undesirable for the pedestrian to meet two cave-like vehicular openings below the glass bridge leading to Transit Street.
- The proposal has not adequately addressed the short but highly visible elevation at Dollar Street to the south. Also, a rendering of the northwest corner of the project (the corner of James and S. Water Streets), would be helpful to better understand the corner plaza.
- If pursued, the stackable parking needs visuals to help explain how that is a good and feasible parking solution for this site— in this city. We support the plan to do a comprehensive parking study.
- We welcome incorporation of the granite blocks currently delineating each vacant District parcel. This is a creative and appropriate response.

Urbanica

- Thoughtful design development went into this proposal, inspired by Providence's well-loved 10,000 Suns temporary botanical installation. The team displayed a keen understanding of the current and future context of the site, including its surroundings

and constraints. Two important results are the responsive stepping down of the massing from south to north and the curvilinear design that addresses all four sides of the parcel.

- We suggest greater consideration of retail (or service or gallery) use at the ground level of the S. Main Street elevation where the artist studios are located. A live-work approach for artists is a fine idea, but the ground floor should be open to the public in a meaningful way.
- Urbanica's coupling of the terra-cotta panels and colorful highlights at the fenestration, applied with finesse, could be a fresh but restrained choice for the exterior that will compliment the neighborhood and age well.
- The S. Main Street side seemed well-conceived with the lower volume's differing exterior material (or color, or both), an appropriate change because of the differing height.
- We appreciate the mindfulness given to the design at the northern end of the site at James Street where Parcel 2 abuts 403 S. Main Street, which is in the historic district overlay.
- We found Urbanica's response to the pedestrian access between and underneath the building at the Transit Street easement to be the most considerate and desirable. We would like to see further refinement and detail of the glass connector.

Parent and Diamond

- The team's diversity and commitment to inclusivity in the development sector are impressive, but we found that the proposal does not meet these ideals. The high bar and aspiration of the design presented and the anticipated cost of the units makes this project luxury housing and out of reach for those in need of home-buying opportunities. *Following receipt of our letter, we understand from the team that their diversity and inclusion program in construction of the project was overlooked by our analysis.*
- We are also extremely concerned that this proposal is not economically feasible. Below-grade structured parking in a recognized floodplain proves to be cost-prohibitive.
- Design-wise, the sinuous form of the building is attractive and responsive to the site, but a better understanding of material choices is needed.
- The landscape plan is pleasing and demonstrably more reliant on plant material than the other proposals. Landscaped areas serve as amenities for the residents, but are not necessarily inviting to the public by comparison.
- This project does not show deference to the c. 1770 building at 403 S. Main Street, which is obviously a challenge for Parcel 2 development. A more elegant acknowledgement and relationship would be advised on James Street.
- We are unable to discern how the three ground floor, one-story (?) residential units facing S. Main Street are articulated, and we question whether a retail or commercial use with public access would be a better solution.
- PPS consistently supports public art, but we are concerned that the wall mural will be an afterthought, will not be maintained, or used to camouflage a point of weak design. These concerns can be allayed with the proposed partnership with the Avenue Concept.

From each prospective team, we would like to know what sustainable, resilient, and energy efficient features would underlie the project. We have asked them to elaborate on material choices, solar energy components, projected energy consumption, energy sourcing, and sustainability goals. We appreciate any efforts the Commission makes to prioritize the sustainability of new construction projects within the District.

Thank you for considering our comments, as well as those of the neighborhood associations and the public. Parcel 2, as you well know, is a prominently positioned District parcel on the East Side, and we expect a high level of thoughtful design and planning as the Commission works to rebuild the urban fabric previously destroyed by the highway. If you have any questions about the above remarks, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brent Runyon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end of the word "Runyon".

Brent Runyon
Executive Director