

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: July 30, 2026

Meeting #112

Project: Living Classrooms – Crossroads School

Phase: Schematic I

Location: 802 S. Caroline Street

Design Team: Ziger Snead, iO Studio

Introduction

Living Classrooms currently operates as a Charter Middle School, serving grades 6-8. They are proposing to expand to K-8 with this proposal. The existing Edward St. John middle school building on site will remain and be used for the new K-5 students. The Barn, Greenhouse, Mikulski, and Weinberg buildings will be demolished. The new building at the west end of the site will serve grades 6-8. The existing tower will be demolished and rebuilt.

Three different site strategies were discussed. Strengths and weaknesses of each strategy were discussed.

The ultimate goal is to expand to include a High School, so the east end of the site was left open for future development. Learning by doing pedagogy is integral to design. Green space extends from the green space to the water.

Site design allows for one way loop for a single entry and exit point to avoid conflicts with students.

Development team discussed site natural origins, and industrial history, and how to incorporate the past into the new development through materials and plantings.

Play platform at the end of the site is treated as a “fifth façade”

Renderings of the site plan, landscaping, and plant palette were shared.

Development team shared architecture history of the area and how the goal is to tie that history into the new building. Discussed material palette. Mass timber building, metal panels, and glazing. Goal is to have as much natural light as possible.

Panel Questions

Pavlina:

- **Were other schemes studied?**

Yes, however the other schemes were single loaded corridors, and the scheme that was chosen saved more space on the site and allowed for double loaded corridors.

- **Were other drop off schemes studied?**

Yes, staff at Living Classrooms didn't want to increase parking from what currently exists. There were constraints on Bus drop off, which required more turning radius. Thirty spaces were needed. Current layout also allowed for more space for future expansion.

- **How would expansion affect the current parking proposal?**

Possibly under and to the side, but the plan has not been worked out yet.

Kevin:

- **How old is the barn?**

Late 80's early 90's

- **Is the greenhouse being moved or demolished and rebuilt?**

Demolished and rebuilt

- **How did other schemes limit future development?**

Construction access would be more difficult with footprints that take up more space.

Kevin:

- **How is play for a wide range of children being accommodated?**

Currently, the majority of play is on the platform. An additional play space for younger children is being considered. But we want to maintain quad as much as possible.

Pavlina:

- **It will be important to be more explicit on how outdoor learning and play is located.**
- **Is the architecture rooted in institutional architecture?**

Goal was to make this feel as open and as light filled as possible within a school setting.

Panel Comments

Kevin:

- You may have gone too far into architecture and materiality at this stage in comparison to site development.
- It's a shame to lose the barn for vehicle storage. If there is a way to keep it, please consider.
- Designated play areas for elementary and middle school are needed.
- Was there any thought to make the building taller to include both the middle and elementary school in one building to free up more space?

The cost made that option undoable.

- The future high school is going to be difficult to fit into the site.
- The concept of the continuous green interrupted with the location of the green building.
- Bus dropoffs should probably be on Dock Street to separate from the vehicular drop off to eliminate backups.
- Give more consideration to how High School would work on the site.

Pavlina:

- Underplaying the dominance of cars is encouraged, especially in this urban context. A third of the site will now be covered by cars.
- More urban analysis is needed. There doesn't seem to be consideration of the urban context. There aren't many views of how this site will be perceived from ground level. How does this project influence the immediate urban context and vice versa.
- Future development of the High School should not preclude development along South Caroline Street, as access from Dock Street is available.
- The existing site has been around for some time, and the site has an iconic nature. How does the new proposal tap into that character.
- The cars blocking the view of the garden from Dock and Lancaster is unfortunate.
- Two curb cuts on South Caroline Street aren't sensitive to the urban context. Consider consolidating parking on the Dock Street side to preserve some views of the site from Lancaster and to reduce curb cuts.
- If the concept of a High School is serious and driving the design, there should be a master plan done. What happens if the High School never materializes. Is the current layout satisfying for the next 50 years?
- Dock Street as great candidate for Bus drop-off. It doesn't require additional paving and cuts down on how much paving is needed on site.
- Consider having the middle school front on South Caroline Street should the high school never materialize.
- Building seems to speak more to Harbor Point and Harbor East, more than the historic architecture of Baltimore. One of the goals of the team was to continue the unique character of the campus. There needs to be more exploration on that front.

- **How do middle schoolers learn? How does the architecture tie into that.**
- **Because the new building is a larger mass, the tower no longer reads as a tower, but more so as an extension of the building.**

Kevin:

- **How are you teaching kids about sustainable / stormwater management.**

This will be taken into consideration.

Next Steps:

Continue to develop design taking comments under advisement. Work with Planning on next steps.

* UDAAP Chairperson

** Assigned Planning Staff

Pavlina Ilieva*, Osborn Anthony, Kevin Storm, Sharon Bradley – UDAAP Panel

Antoine Heath**

Additional Comment from Panelists who could not make it are below.

Osborn Anthony:

1. The scope of the project is not clearly defined other than some aspects of the Living Classroom program being replaced, but the schemes shared are not consistent about what is being changed. Hopefully the team can clarify their presentation.
2. The team should provide more information on how the program is distributed, including student age group and program allocation to better convey the assumptions for building and where they should be located on the site.
3. There is a sense of openness to the site overall, but I'm guessing there are some portions of the site that may need more privacy to foster focused learning. Maybe this will be discussed in the presentation.
4. The analysis of the various schemes is not consistent, as some items described and evaluated in some schemes seem to be dismissed in others. For instance, one scheme suggests a layout that places a portion of the proposed building intervening on the water/harbor spur, to avoid utilities, but isn't clear where the utilities are located and if other schemes are impacted, even marginally.

5. It seems like the scheme selected was based on a programmatic need with not enough examination of site relationships and overall analysis.
6. It would help if a few goals were defined early, and the schemes were developed and tested against those goals.
7. The slides on history are incoherent and likely incomplete. They don't convey the historic significance of the site, compared to what I know of the site. Nor do they inform the design intent. Maybe their presentation will make it clear.
8. Primary access is from S. Caroline for both vehicles and pedestrians, with some secondary access off Dock St. The new building is on the far side of the site remote from the main access points. The design needs to consider the procession through the site to address a key building being so remote from the main access points.
9. Pedestrian circulation into the sight from Caroline crosses the parking lot. Consider a more defined pedestrian circulation path that separates walkers from moving and parking vehicles. Although a quadrangle is suggested, the buildings do not exactly relate to that open space very well. Also, the building that has access from Dock St is neither here nor there in its relating to Dock Street or the quadrangle.
10. The new building fronts on Central Ave and Dock St. There likely isn't direct access from the Central Ave bridge. I'm curious to understand access for maintenance and deliveries.
11. The corner at Dock St seems to be used for back of house and support services program. It is the corner and I suggest a gentler approach to turn the corner. Most surrounding buildings negotiate corners more elegantly; this building should aim to do the same.
12. The typology suggests an open plan type structure expressed with a regular grid defined by floor-to-floor glazed panels. Clarify the origins of this typology.
13. Building design has large expanses of glazing. While it may be early in the design process, the facade on Central Ave is facing west and will be flooded with sunlight resulting in huge heat gain. I'm curious to hear how the team plan to shape this portion of the building to respond to environmental challenges.
14. This project seems to be a great candidate apply sustainability goals and seek certification. It seems perfect for a model high-performance facility. Hopefully the developer and project sponsors have this in mind.
15. Be more intentional in developing a scheme for the residual spaces between buildings that are developed to foster collaboration, outdoor use, and the spirit of adaptive learning in an urban environment.

