



BEAUFORT COUNTY
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (DRB) MINUTES
August 1, 2024, Grace Coastal Church, 15 Williams Drive, Okatie, SC

Members Present: James Atkins, J. Michael Brock, Peter Brower, Kris Feldmann, Roger Jadown and Eric Walsnovich

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Nancy Moss, Beaufort County Community Development Department
Mary Brantley, Beaufort County Community Development Department

Guests:

Okatie Center – Medical Office Building Exterior Renovations: John Powell, Seed Architecture and Andrew Cheatham, KBS Landscape Architecture & Planning

Okatie Center – The “H” Building: Mike Vaccaro, Vaccaro Architecture; Kathleen Duncan, J. K. Tiller Associates; and Steve Richbourg, May River Contracting

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Atkins called the meeting to order at 2:33 p.m.
2. **FOIA:** Chairman Atkins said that “public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act”.
3. **MINUTES:** Chairman Atkins asked if there were comments on the updated July 11, 2024, meeting minutes. Mr. Brower motioned to approve the meeting minutes and Mr. Brock seconded to approve. Motion carried unanimously.
4. **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS:** There was no public comment.
5. **NEW BUSINESS:** None
6. **OLD BUSINESS:**
 - A. **Okatie Center – Lot S-19 – Medical Office Building Exterior Renovations, 40 Okatie Center Boulevard – Bluffton - Final**

Ms. Moss gave the project background. Mr. Atkins asked for public comment, but no comments were made. John Powell, the Architect for the project, made the presentation and stated that Drew Cheatham with KBS Landscape Architecture & Planning was also in attendance. He said that he appreciated the Board’s feedback from the last DRB meeting and stated that they incorporated everything that was requested. He gave the Board a brief summary of the requested approvals they were seeking, and said that they wanted approval of the DOAS system that is mounted on the roof and that a small portion would be visible from the front of the building but that from a distance the existing tall trees on the perimeter of the site would screen the equipment from view from the Highways and main road, that the existing color scheme was discussed and that they wished to change out the colors, that they brought the physical brick material & colors to the meeting and said that the colored renderings look slightly different than the actual colors being proposed. Mr.

Powell described that the bulk of the building would be a lighter “Mindful Gray”, and the accent features would be the darker gray applied on the soffits, fascia, gutters, and downspouts. He stated that the brick proposed would be a Savannah Moss which looked like the existing brick color that was being removed, and that the existing light gray shingles would remain. He concluded by stating that the screen wall is a masonry CMU screen wall with a flat top with walls clad in stucco with brick accents.

Mr. Cheatham referred to sheet LS1 and explained that they added a mixture of three different foundation shrubs at the perimeter of the building and stated that they were able to save four live oaks on the interior island. He asked the Board if there was any flexibility on how far the shrubs could be to the base of the building because they would like to push the shrubs away from the base of the building to avoid creating the same negative drainage situation that occurred in the past.

Mr. Walsnovich stated that it is good practice to plan for the shrubs to be 12” from the base of the wall when the plant reaches maturity. He said that he appreciated the encore azaleas proposed but indicated that there may be a problem with the deer. He asked that the plan be adjusted so the locations of the sago palms are moved away from the sidewalk to allow space for them to grow. He said that he liked the specified height of the shrubs but that it would be difficult meeting the plant heights with a 3-gallon container and asked that the container size be increased to a 7-gallon size.

Mr. Brower said that it was a nice-looking building. He asked why the canopy end on the north elevation did not align with anything. Mr. Powell said that this was an existing building, that the back door was original and that he believed that the canopy was that built to appease DHEC’s regulations for a covered canopy over a drop-off area.

Mr. Brock said that in addition to the azaleas, the pittosporum may also be susceptible to deer. Mr. Powell asked for shrub recommendations. Mr. Brock said to add evergreen shrubs similar to the ones proposed.

Mr. Jadown said that he had nothing to add other than the new colors looked a little dark.

Mr. Feldmann had no comments.

Mr. Atkins said that the new colors looked great, that the rooftop equipment was discussed at the last meeting and that he appreciated the service yard screening.

Mr. Brock made a motion to approve this project with the conditions to:

- Revisit the azalea and pittosporum foundation buffer plantings and propose shrubs that are deer tolerant and increase the plant container size from 3- gallon to 7-gallon.

Mr. Brock read the standard final condition “the building exterior renovations and the new equipment screen, landscaping & drainage improvements must be done according to the plans reviewed and approved by the DRB. The material and color board reviewed and approved by the DRB must be adhered to during construction. Any changes to the approved plans or submittals must be requested for and submitted to the DRB for formal approval before changes are made”.

Mr. Feldmann seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Okatie Center – Lot S-15 – The “H” Building, 211 Okatie Village Drive – Bluffton – Final:

Ms. Moss gave the project background. Mr. Atkins asked for public comment, but no comments were made. Mike Vaccaro, the Architect for the project, and Kathleen Duncan, the Landscape Architect for the project, presented to the Board. Mr. Vaccaro said that he did not have anything to add to the staff report and that they have complied with all of the DRB requests and comments to change the design and welcomed comments from the Board.

Mr. Walsnovich referred to the landscape plan and questioned the conflict with the shade trees and light poles in the center tree island. Ms. Duncan stated that she would adjust the locations of the shade trees in the center tree island to avoid conflicts. Mr. Walsnovich said that one of the staff comments was to beef up the perimeter buffers. He asked that the gaps within the Highway 278 buffer get filled. He said that liked the dumpster location, because it made more sense closer to the restaurant.

Mr. Brower said he was not at the last meeting and stated that this version of the building looked much better than it did at the first meeting.

Mr. Brock said that the trees are supposed to be on each end of the tree island and that one tree in each tree island did not meet the requirements. Ms. Moss said that SRT allowed the configuration of the narrower tree islands. Mr. Brock stated that the northern buffer needs more landscape coverage with a combination shrubs and trees to help since the shade trees in the middle tree island have been reduced by two, to add shrubs at the head of the parking spaces for better parking lot screening, adding more landscape height on the west buffer and stated that a layer of understory trees within the existing pines should be added to the front buffer along Okatie Village Drive.

Mr. Jadown stated that the second story center glass area appeared to be hanging without support, that there is a 7' overhang and when looking at the building in perspective there's a lot of competition with the top portion of the building versus when viewing the building in elevation, and that there is no differentiation from the first and second floors except for a slab which appears a little weak. He said that the west side front corner had two sets of piers hanging out and made it look top heavy with no support.

Mr. Feldmann asked whether the detail on sheet A-310 changed since the last meeting. Mr. Vaccaro said that the slope on the flashing changed from 1.5/12 to 3/12. Mr. Feldman said that the detail essentially did not change except for the slope on the flashing and that one of the conditions from the last meeting was to revisit detail A-310 and that his comments from the last meeting still stand. He said that the top heaviness of the second floor had no separation or transition from the columns from the first floor to the second floor and that this condition has not been addressed. He asked what the purpose of the elevator was and if it opened at the roof. Mr. Vaccaro said that it opened on the roof for service.

Mr. Atkins said that new dumpster location was a great spot, the site needs enhanced buffers all the way around and should be comparable to other sites along the corridor, and if additional buffer

layers exist off-site, the applicant shall provide tree survey data to document this. He said that there are a cluster of HVAC units on the back rooftop and wanted to know the heights of these units and how they would be mounted. Mr. Vaccaro said that units would be 42" or under and would be mounted on 6" feet and would be back from the parapet wall 12" to 18". Mr. Atkins said the Board would need confirmation about the HVAC screening because it was going to be tight and that they were located on the Highway 278 side of the building. He said that Mr. Feldmann mentioned the elevator and that it went up to the rooftop and asked whether the roof would be occupied. Mr. Vaccaro said that it would not be occupied but that it could be. Mr. Atkins asked why the elevator and two sets of stairs went to the rooftop. Mr. Vaccaro said they wanted service access to the roof for the HVAC equipment and that the owner may take clients up to the roof to show them his work. Mr. Atkins said that the roof plan does not show the roofing material proposed and asked what people would walk on. Mr. Vaccaro said that the roof would have waterproofing over concrete. Mr. Atkins said that from the initial conceptual review of this project, the Board has had conversations about the height and disorganization of the elements that extend beyond the parapet. He questioned whether the elevator going all the way up to the roof was just to service the HVAC. He said he had concerns because there were too many means of egress to the roof, an elevator lobby, and a 42" parapet wall which is the height needed for a guardrail so there are a lot of things that add up that the roof will be converted into some occupiable space in the future. Mr. Atkins referred to the elevations and stated that on the side elevations the cornice breaks and there are stair elements that pop up and the right side looks okay because it's grounded but the left side looks like it's going to tip over. He said that the brackets across the front on the very end stick out 12', which leaves a huge horizontal bracket that has a completely different language than the other ones; not sure using the same language across the whole thing when it is a completely different structural expression on the end makes a lot of sense to support a light 3/12 metal roof. He said that it seems like a lot of structure to support that. Mr. Atkins stated that when this project came in for DRB conceptual review it was very far along with architectural details and structural engineered drawings, so the Board didn't have early design input. He said that the thin metal roof return is bothersome, and the slab is on the front tower element but not on the back side and it disappears, so it's not really needed. He said that the cornice breaks on the sides are bothersome and since conceptual the stair towers don't seem well integrated into the design. Mr. Atkins referred to the enlarged 3D detail and said it amplifies the comments from the last meeting. He described the building design as a dynamic cantilevered formed concrete structure being covered with brick and then the element which supports it, a thin cant and little roof cutting across when it gets to the end it's just supporting a roof and it's lost its connect to supporting the big vertical column. He questioned why there was stucco infill and was it intentional and why not edged stone details. Mr. Vaccaro said there would be no detailing and that they want to achieve a clean look. Mr. Atkins said that the window spacing seemed off center to the bays. Mr. Vaccaro said everything is centered except the one entrance. Mr. Atkins stated that at the far upper left it is noted on the enlarged elevation that its spandrel but it's not glass and questioned whether the actual glass was spandrel. Mr. Vaccaro said that it was black out glass. Mr. Atkins said that there are a handful of locations where there is the brick above and the details below and the upper section is thicker than the lower section which adds to the heaviness of the scheme. He said that he likes the concept but struggles with the execution of the details. He said that within the PUD document there is reference to Lowcountry architecture, that the center piece is floating and struggled with the stairs and how they are haphazardly placed on the roof.

Mr. Vaccaro said that there were three conditions from last month's meeting and that's what they addressed. He thought that the Board comments made during the discussion about the top-heaviness of the building was not something that had to be re-worked because they weren't mentioned in the conditions. He stated that this is the epidemic of a Lowcountry building in the spirit of Lowcountry design, with all of the materials for the building being produced in the Lowcountry and built with local tradesman. He asked that the current building design be reviewed against the conditions of the last meeting.

Mr. Atkins said that throughout the various reviews for this project, the Board has shared concerns about the rooftop stairway structures, the detail of the slab and the connection bisecting the top, the covered patio with the 12' bracket doesn't work, and other issues have not been resolved. Mr. Vaccaro said that everything that was present at the last meeting are present at this meeting and there is no reason to change major aspects of the design. He said that they have worked with the Board from the first iteration.

Mr. Feldmann said he didn't think that detail A-310 was addressed by simply changing the slope of the flashing. He wondered what concerns the Board had if the roof were occupied.

Mr. Atkins stated that if the space on the roof were occupied, it would increase the number of parking spaces required on-site.

Mr. Brock recalled a previous project that wished to occupy the roof, and he wondered whether the PUD or POA would allow rooftop occupation. He said that everything is indicating that the rooftop will be occupied. Mr. Vaccaro said that the roof could be potentially occupied, but they are not submitting it as such.

Mr. Feldmann said that the rooftop elevator structure introduces an incredibility competing element on the building.

Mr. Atkins said that the elevator is a very expensive unit and if there is no intention to use it other than to just replace the HVAC unit, it doesn't make sense. He said that it all stems from the Board trying to understand the intent of the project and the Board's concerns of the competing elements on the roof. He said that if the elevator is not needed, it would help the design to remove it, but the question is whether it is needed.

Mr. Vaccaro said that the final review is to refine the details, but the Board is now requesting major design changes which were not part of the conceptual motions or part of the comments.

Mr. Atkins disagreed with Mr. Vaccaro's comments and said the final review for the project is in its totality and is the opportunity for the Board to make sure everything is right.

Mr. Vaccaro asked the Board to determine if this building is on par with other buildings in this PUD.

Mr. Brower said that Mr. Vaccaro stated earlier in the meeting that "this building was the epidemic of a Lowcountry structure" and that he saw very little in the way of Lowcountry architecture with the form of this building.

Ms. Duncan said the massing of this building and the visibility will be blocked significantly by the mature pine trees in the PUD buffer next to Highway 278 and with the supplemental plantings proposed in the rear buffer of this project.

Mr. Atkins said that the Board has made it clear from the beginning that it is a cool building, cool project and has a lot of potential but they have also been clear from the beginning that there are massive challenges with things above the parapet. He said that the Board was trying to help move the project along the process with a preliminary approval and that the current drawings are pretty much the same as were presented at the last meeting and said he was ready to make a motion.

Mr. Atkins made a motion to table this project to allow the applicant the opportunity revise the drawings to address the following comments:

- Update the landscape plan:
 - with enhanced buffers: the northern buffer needs more landscape coverage with a combination shrubs and trees; adding more landscape height on the west buffer and add a layer of understory trees within the front buffer along Okatie Village Drive.
 - add shrubs at the head of the parking spaces for better parking lot screening.
- The covered porch & detail on the far-right corner should be resolved at the extended slab / roof overhang.
- The cornice on the sides should be connected from left to right so as to avoid the cantilevered side feeling asymmetrical.
- Confirm that the windows & the window spacing are all centered with the bays.
- Provide some details on the HVAC equipment on height and mounting to roof to confirm the parapet will fully screen the mechanical units from view.
- Provide a written statement that the rooftop will not be occupied on the building.
- Re-study the elements that extend past the parapet to provide more consistent height & relation to primary building.

Mr. Brower seconded the motion.

Mr. Atkins asked if any of the Board members wished to have a discussion about the motion. There was no discussion.

Motion carried unanimously.

7. **OTHER BUSINESS:** Mr. Atkins stated that the next scheduled meeting would be held at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, September 5, 2024, at Grace Coastal Church, 15 Williams Drive, Okatie, SC 29909.
8. **ADJOURNMENT:** Mr. Brock made a motion to close the meeting and Mr. Jadown seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.