



Alexandria, Virginia

Historic Alexandria Resources Commission

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September 19, 2022

Board of Architectural Review
Parker-Gray Historic District
City of Alexandria

Re: BAR #2022-00175 PG Samuel Madden Homes

Dear Chairman Spencer and Members of the Board:

In our previous statement on this project, the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission "strongly endorse(d) the staff's recommendation that you invite the applicant for a fourth Concept Review work session" on the project, and we are gratified that you have done so.

Unfortunately, the rescheduled date for this Concept Review (September 20) coincides with the regular monthly meeting of our Commission, so we will not be able to send a representative.

We appreciate your Chairman's and staff's action to assure that our July 20 statement was circulated to the members of the Board in time to be considered at your meeting that evening. That statement remains a valid report of our recommendations and is attached again here for your reference.

In sum, while recognizing the progress that has already been achieved, we urge you to pursue your strict scrutiny as to the appropriate height and mass, following as closely as possible both the letter and spirit of the Braddock East Master Plan's specific expectations regarding height, scale, and massing at this site, as well as its Guideline for the provision of publicly accessible, ground level open space.

We are also concerned about how the currently proposed height and mass particularly of the building on the northern block would affect the existing, modestly scaled residential townhomes to the northeast. Notwithstanding some amelioration that has been suggested through setbacks, the essential character of the buildings remains quite massive.

You are certainly familiar with the concern that is sometimes expressed about the potential impact on the Historic Districts of taller and more massive buildings proposed to be constructed on their peripheries. It would be ironic if, in this case, massive buildings within the Parker-Gray

Historic District were to loom forbiddingly over their human-scale neighbors just outside the District.

We hope that your fourth Concept Review regarding this proposal can consider further improvements to the height and mass of the proposed buildings, and that your guidance as to their architectural character can also help to ameliorate their visually apparent as well as actual mass.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Danny Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Danny" and last name "Smith" clearly legible.

Danny Smith, Chair

Historic Alexandria Resources Commission

cc: Gretchen Bulova, Director
Office of Historic Alexandria

Bill Conkey, Historic Preservation Architect
Board of Architectural Review

Statement Regarding 899 and 999 North Henry Street BAR Case #2022-00175, July 20, 2022
Presented on behalf of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission by Chairman Danny Smith

Chairman Spencer and Members of the Board:

My name is Danny Smith. I am Chairman of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC) and am speaking on behalf of the Commission. We reviewed the staff report on this proposal at our meeting on July 19, and we submit these comments for your consideration.

The Parker-Gray Historic District is of critical importance in Alexandria's unique array of signature, character-defining historic resources. In addition to the many surviving historic homes, the entire District is listed in its own right on the National Register of Historic Places.

We have been concerned that the height, mass and scale of these buildings in the northwestern portion of the District as originally proposed could risk serious damage to its historic integrity and character. So we applaud the applicant, the BAR, and staff for your progress in mitigating potential harm.

The 74' and 75' heights now proposed for buildings in these two blocks still substantially exceed the 50' limit that has ordinarily applied in practice and by regulation in the Parker-Gray District. They also exceed the Braddock East Master Plan recommendations of a maximum height range of 50'-60' (south block) and 60'-70' (north block) at this site. Nonetheless, the 75' height is a welcome improvement over the 83' previously proposed for the southern building, particularly when taken also in the context of efforts to reduce the apparent massing through variation in heights, planes and setbacks.

We note that the Plan contemplated further evaluation of heights through the DSUP process. We believe that while distinct progress has been achieved, further consideration of height and mass could be fruitful.

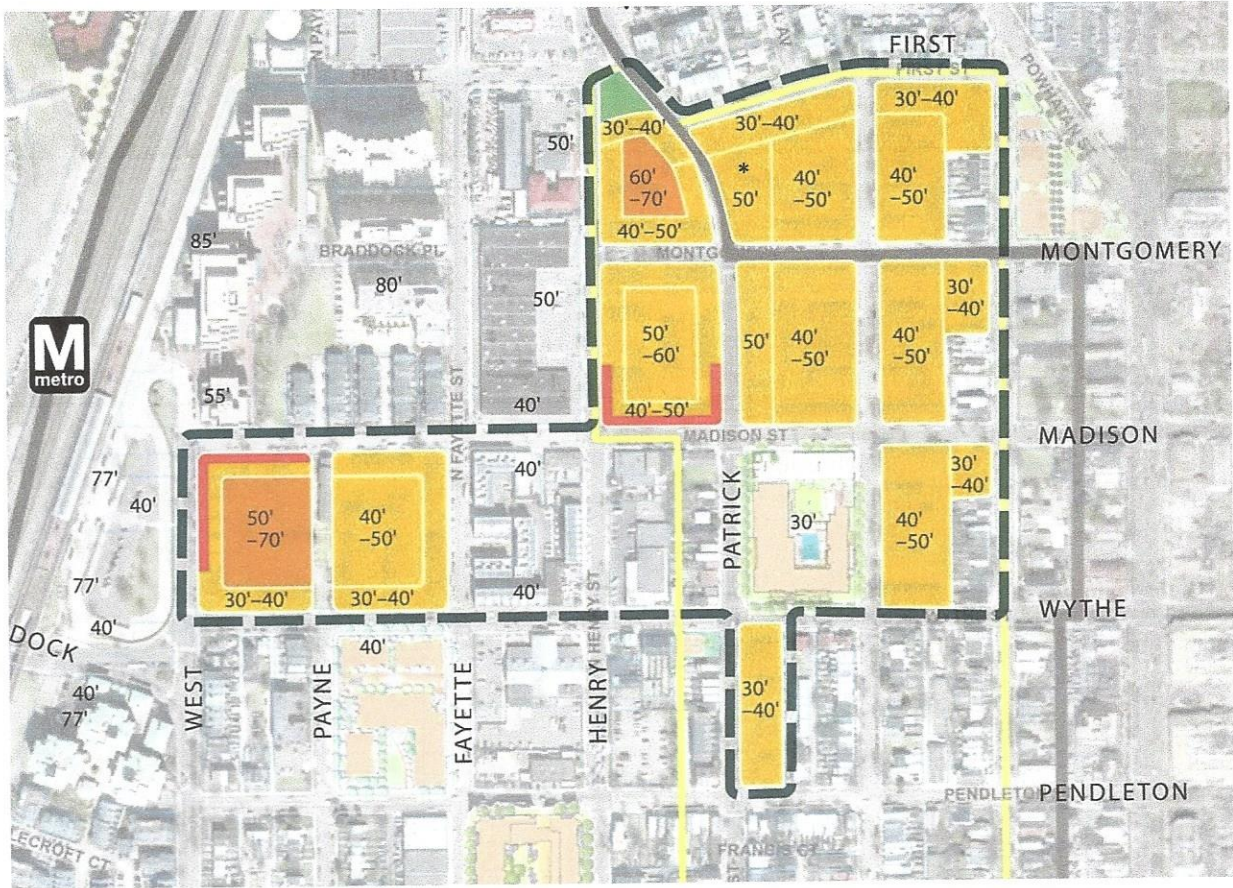
We urge you to continue this strict scrutiny, following as closely as possible both the letter and the spirit of (1) the Braddock East Master Plan's specific recommendations regarding height, scale, and massing at this site (pp. 46, 51); (2) your Design Guidelines, and those discussed in the Plan (p. 67 et seq.); and (3) the Plan's guideline that "publicly accessible, ground level open space will be provided to meet the needs of residents (especially children) in the new development" (p. 52). We note that open space with year-round sunlight is highly desirable.

It appears that the current proposal reflects a responsible effort to consider the impact on neighboring buildings. We urge the BAR to maintain its particular attention to the Braddock Metro East Plan's recommendations that (1) "All new development in the plan area will provide appropriate transitions in scale and massing that respect neighboring residential properties" (Recommendation 5, p. 57) and (2) with specific reference to building heights of the northern block of the Samuel Madden site, "Particular attention should be given to the relationship with existing residential townhomes to the northeast. There should be variation in building height across the block to mitigate the massing effect of the new structure." (Recommendation 11C, p. 58)

We especially appreciate the concept of breaking up the visually apparent vertical as well as horizontal mass, applying the "base-middle-top" principle cited in the Master Plan's Design Guidelines (p. 81). That kind of differentiation in the façade can make an important difference in whether a building of a given mass and height is viewed as a block-long, 75' monolith looming over its human-scale neighbors, or rather as a structure which complements and respects the context of the Historic District of which it will be a part.

We therefore strongly endorse the staff's recommendation that you invite the applicant for a fourth Concept Review work session to focus on the general architectural character—with the expectation that your attention to application of the Plan's recommendations on architectural design and the BAR's own *Design Guidelines* are likely to extend further the commendable improvement that you and the applicant have already accomplished.

Development Framework



■ Retail space

■ Proposed/existing retail adjacent to plan area

Approximate height:

■ 30'-60' building

■ 61'-90' building

■ Braddock East boundary

■ Parker-Gray Historic District boundary

■ Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan boundary

Note: building setbacks for graphic purposes only.

*Except that one multi-family building may be increased to 60 feet in the northern multi-family block adjacent to Patrick Street.

Pedestrian Connections

The CDD shall enhance the pedestrian experience for residents, employees, and visitors to the neighborhood with appropriate streetscape, sidewalks, lighting, and intersection amenities. Alfred Street is identified as a “walking street” and is to be enhanced with wider sidewalks, deeper and varied front yards, and the inclusion of front porches in building designs and/or active retail uses at ground level along Patrick Street.

Parking

For all building types, other than townhomes, all parking shall be located below grade. For townhomes, access to parking/garages shall be from an internal alley or street. Surface parking lots for 10 or more spaces are prohibited. Parking shall be provided in accordance with the parking standards in Section 7 of this Plan.

Transportation

CDD property owners shall participate in a district-wide Transportation Management Plan (TMP) to include all future developments in the Braddock East Planning Area and the Braddock Metro Neighborhood, as established in the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan.

Management

The new development will provide high quality and experienced management of facilities and grounds, with homeowner and tenant associations that are attentive and sensitive to the needs of all its residents.

A community association or similar group, including property-owners and ARHA residents should be established to ensure that public housing residents have a voice in the new community.

Samuel Madden Uptown



CDD boundary for Samuel Madden

Land Uses

Allowable uses within the CDD include residential (and related accessory uses), retail and office. The residential use should provide a range of housing including market-rate and public, and affordable/workforce units when feasible. Ground floor retail space that is primarily neighborhood-serving and pedestrian-friendly shall be provided at street level. Retail uses may include a grocery store. The locations of retail uses shall be consistent with the Development Framework Plan within this Plan.

Height

Maximum height ranges are shown in Section 7 of this Plan. The final building heights will be further evaluated through the DSUP process. In order to facilitate walkable streets and improve transition with adjacent residential buildings, a building ‘shoulder’ (an upper-level setback of

the building façade) will be required where appropriate.

Density

Maximum density shall be:

- 0.75 FAR
- 2.0 FAR with SUP approval.

Building Design

Development shall be consistent with the design principles articulated in the Development Framework in Section 7 of this Plan, which in turn refers to the Urban Design Guidelines of the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan (Appendix C). Development shall also adhere to the historic district guidelines as they relate to Parker-Gray. The northern portion of any future building should accentuate this site's gateway location with a memorable building form, shape and/or materials.

Open Space

Publicly accessible, ground level open space will be provided to meet the needs of residents (especially children) in the new development. If a grocery store is proposed, a portion of the open space requirement may be provided on the roof of the grocery store (or other large single use) if planted with a vegetated (green) roof and if overlooked by residential. An open space/focal point should be provided at the site's northern apex, to complement its gateway location and the character of the neighborhood.

Street Grid

The CDD shall retain its current network of streets. Where practical, a central alley pattern should be reintroduced to provide access to parking and loading. Commercial loading (and trash pickup) for retail uses should occur in an alley.

Pedestrian Connections

The CDD shall enhance the pedestrian experience for residents, employees, and visitors to the neighborhood with appropriate

streetscape, sidewalks, lighting, and intersection amenities. Madison Street is identified as a "walking street" to be enhanced with wider sidewalks, deeper and varied front yards, the inclusion of front porches, balconies and/or lobby entrances in building designs and/or active retail or restaurant uses at ground level.

Parking

For all building types other than town homes, all parking shall be located below grade. For townhomes, access to parking/garages shall be from an internal alley or street. Surface parking lots for 10 or more spaces are prohibited. Parking shall be provided in accordance with the parking standards in Section 7 of this Plan.

Transportation

CDD property owners shall participate in a district-wide Transportation Management Plan (TMP) to include all future developments in the Braddock East Planning Area and the Braddock Metro Neighborhood, as established in the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan

Management

The new development will provide high quality and experienced management of facilities and grounds, with homeowner and tenant associations that are attentive and sensitive to the needs of all its residents.

A community association or similar group, including property-owners and ARHA residents should be established to ensure that public housing residents have a voice in the new community.

- Priority to residents wishing to remain in their community.
- Proximity to comparable transit, services, jobs, amenities, quality schools.
- Maintain a critical mass at each development to create a sense of community for public housing residents and ensure feasibility for efficient management and provision of supportive services.
- Ensure public housing units are integrated into the community.
- New housing sites must meet HUD's approval requirements.
- Consider impacts on overall neighborhood's income mix, urban design character, amenities, etc.
- Ensure appropriate timing and phasing to coincide with the phasing of the proposed public housing redevelopment.
- Minimize multiple moves for families and households through effective phasing of redevelopment.
- Minimize moves that will result in children changing schools during the school year.
- Human and social services will be needed to support public housing residents in moving from an exclusively low-income to a mixed-income environment.

Recommendation 3: The ARHA Strategic Plan should consider ways to enhance ARHA's ability to provide human and social services to its residents and providing preparedness training for returning residents to the new mixed-income communities.

Recommendation 4: To achieve the urban design goals set out in this Plan, the ARHA-owned properties of James Bland (and Bland Addition), Samuel Madden Uptown and Andrew Adkins (including the adjacent privately owned single-family properties) will be designated as individual Coordinated Development Districts and be subject to the CDD guidelines set out in Chapter 8 of this Plan.

Recommendation 5: All new development in the plan area will:

- Provide appropriate transitions in scale and massing that respect neighboring residential properties;
- Include architectural variety reflecting neighborhood tradition;
- Create green edges along streets;
- Contribute to walkable streets; and
- Incorporate underground parking.

Recommendation 6: The following recommendations are made with regard to the appropriate **land uses** for each site within the Braddock East Mater Plan Boundary:

- **Recommendation 6A:** All sites should include a mix of public housing and market-rate housing, and affordable and/or workforce housing where possible.
- **Recommendation 6B:** Neighborhood-serving retail is recommended for the ground floor of the Samuel Madden blocks, to compliment existing and proposed retail, with the possible inclusion of a grocery store in these blocks.
- **Recommendation 6C:** Neighborhood-serving retail is recommended for the ground floor of the Andrew Adkins block along Madison Street.
- **Recommendation 6D:** The western half of Adkins and/or the northern Samuel Madden block has potential for office uses, to help to balance the overall mix of uses within the plan area.
- **Recommendation 6E:** A hotel/office use with ground floor retail is recommended for that part of the Adkins block that is currently occupied by the single-family properties between Adkins and West Street.

Recommendation 7: A variety of open spaces should be provided to meet the needs of the residents of the new mixed-income communities. These open spaces should complement the programmed activities at the new Charles Houston Recreation Center.

Recommendation 8: The exterior facades of public and/or affordable housing in the new development should be designed to be indistinguishable from the market rate housing.

Recommendation 9: The public housing units should be integrated throughout the new development, and not concentrated in any one location.

Recommendation 10: The following recommendations relate to the design goals for the **James Bland site**:

Recommendation 10A: A shoulder of 30-40 feet is recommended along First Street and Columbus Street, rising to 40-50 feet toward the center of the site and up to 50 feet along Patrick Street.*

Recommendation 10B: Open space should be located on each block and there should be a minimum of one centralized and consolidated public open space.

Recommendation 10C: Alfred Street should be added to the list of “walking streets” established in the BMNP, where priority is given to the pedestrian.

Recommendation 11: The following recommendations relate to the design goals for the **Samuel Madden site**:

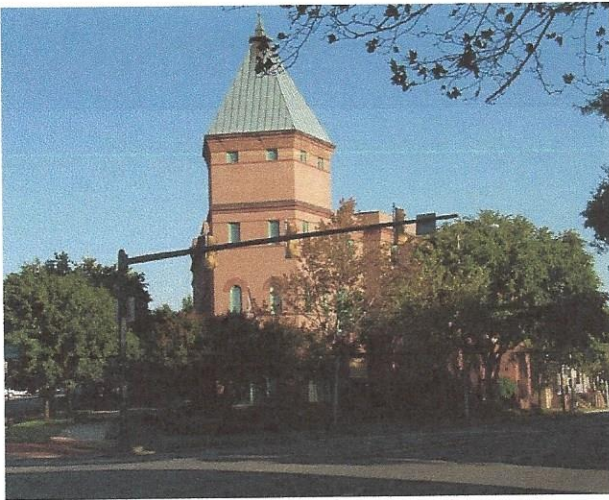
- **Recommendation 11A:** An open space/focal point is recommended at the apex of Samuel Madden at First Street. This should be designed as an attractive entrance at this gateway to the City and as a transition with the surrounding neighborhood.

- **Recommendation 11B:** The northern portion of any future building should highlight this gateway location with a memorable form, shape and/or materials.
- **Recommendation 11C:** Building heights up to 60-70 feet are recommended for the northern block of Samuel Madden, with 30-40 foot shoulders. Particular attention should be given to the relationship with existing residential townhomes to the northeast. There should be variation in building height across the block to mitigate the massing effect of the new structure.
- **Recommendation 11D:** Building heights up to 50-60 feet are recommended for the southern block of Samuel Madden, with 40-50 foot shoulders.
- **Recommendation 11E:** Any retail edges along sidewalks should be transparent, include entrances, and otherwise contribute to the pedestrian realm.

Recommendation 12: The following recommendations relate to the design goals for the **Andrew Adkins site**:

- **Recommendation 12A:** Building heights up to 70 feet with 30-foot shoulders are recommended along the “walking streets” of Wythe, West and Madison. There should be variation in building height across the block to mitigate the massing effect of the new structure and retain existing views where possible.
- **Recommendation 12B:** The continuation of Payne Street axis through the Andrew Adkins site is recommended to reconnect the street grid and reflect the scale and character of the surrounding blocks.
- **Recommendation 12C:** Building heights of up to 50-70 feet with a 30-40 feet shoulder

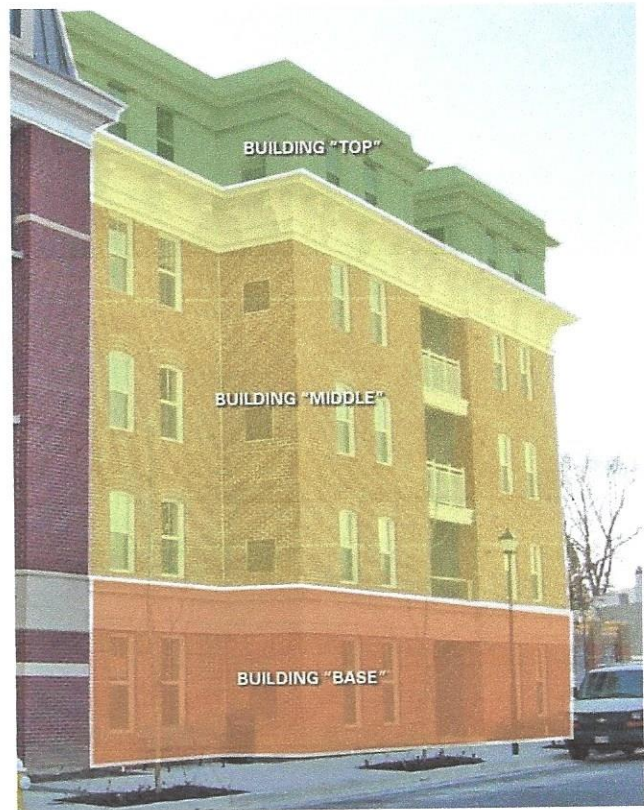
appear bulky compared to context scale nor to block views excessively.



Building elements that rise above the context of surrounding buildings should be treated as attractive landmarks.

Special treatment of upper floors where a building meets the sky creates a sense of drama, helps to make a memorable place, aids in wayfinding, and conveys the message that the building was designed with care, keeping its relationship to its surroundings in mind. The Design Principles for the City of Alexandria require that new buildings be designed using the principles of base/middle/top; create scale transitions that are sensitive to the surrounding building fabric; and employ articulated tower tops to create an interesting skyline, allow views between buildings, and help sunshine to reach lower building levels and public open spaces. This strategy will help to reinforce and add to the vitality of the Braddock neighborhood, while taking advantage of the opportunities offered by transit-oriented development.

- Use of simple geometric shapes in plan and elevation is encouraged, to simplify perception of buildings and help visually integrate them with built context.
- Utilize vertically proportioned fenestration; use no strip/ribbon windows.



3. Pedestrian Engagement

Ground-floor building use and design should engage pedestrians. Retail, office and institutional uses all can and should provide a high level of engagement. In residential buildings, including multifamily buildings, ground-floor units shall include individual street entrances and yards wherever possible. Industrial and institutional buildings with frontage on public streets should locate any engaging uses—such as entrance doors and lobbies, accessory office space, and windows into actively used space—along as much of the public sidewalk as possible.

- For retail and other active ground floor uses, provide transparent glazing for approximately 75% or more of façade area. At corner retail sites, ground-level storefront windows shall extend at least 20 feet along the side street, and both the architecture of the building and the storefront design should address and articulate the corner. The ground floors of all new

Variation of Building Massing

At the last hearing, Board members expressed concern regarding the homogeneous height of building shoulders and the setbacks for upper levels, stating that this consistent height contributes to a feeling that the building is too large for its surrounding. The applicant has addressed this comment by identifying specific locations on the building that respond to adjacent buildings or viewsheds and varying the massing in these locations. As shown in the submitted documents, the proposed design includes a rhythm of massing types with a variety of height and depths for the upper level setback areas. This rhythm breaks up the overall massing, including the roofline, to approximate a rhythm found elsewhere in the historic district (Figure 8).

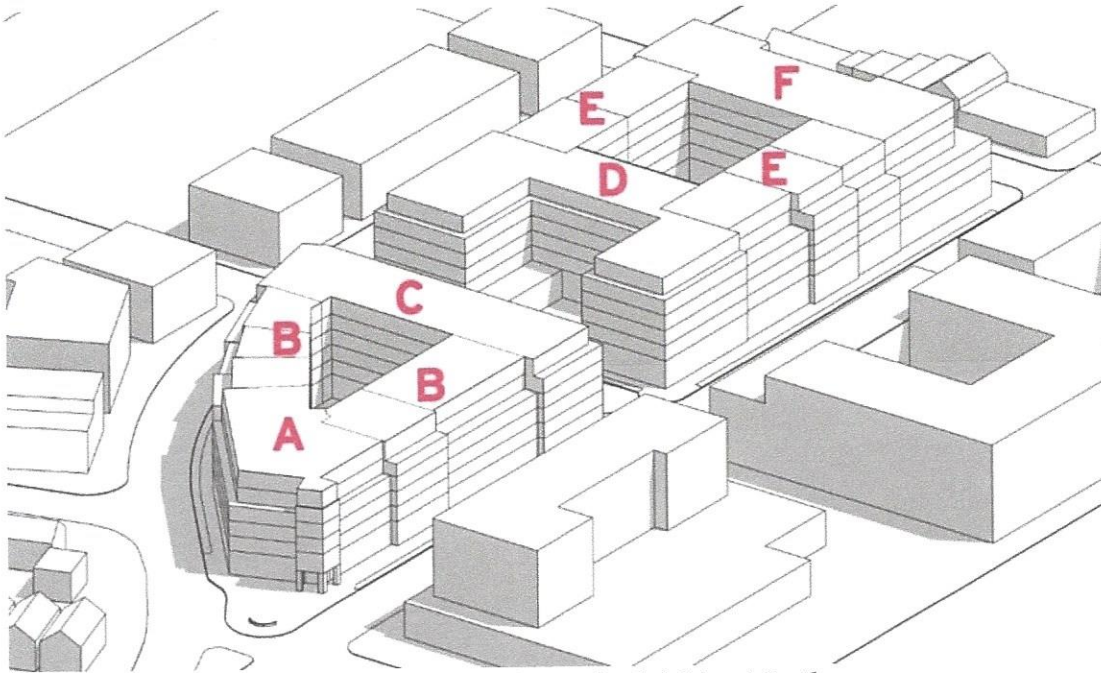


Figure 8: Variation in massing height and depth

IV. STAFF ANALYSIS

As a reminder, the BAR's purview in this Concept Review work session is limited to endorsing the project and providing feedback on its height, scale, mass, and general architectural character. The applicant will ultimately return to the Board for approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for architectural details, finishes, and colors pending City Council approval of the DSUP.

Within the historic districts, the Board utilizes the *Design Guidelines* to determine if a potential new building or additions would be compatible with nearby buildings of historic merit. The proposed development includes two buildings that are on the edge of, but entirely within the historic district. The surrounding area includes a variety of building types and scales. Newer development to the west of the site includes large scale multi-family buildings that are comparable in size to the proposed buildings. Low scale industrial buildings are to the south of the site, and four-story multi-family buildings are directly across North Patrick Street. The building site is a transitional area, transitioning from the James Bland redevelopment to the east to the denser