Advisory Planning, Architecture, and Aesthetics Committee

OCT. 29, 2010 - MEETING OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

IN ATTENDANCE:
Committee members: Janet Riker, David McCaffrey, Steve Beditz, John Giarrusso, Catherine T. Lawson, Fardin Sanai, Justin Wax Jacobs, Christine Bouchard
UAlbany Staff: Errol Millington, Colin Simmons, Ben Weaver (for Susan Phillips), John Baldwin, Diana Delp
Guests: Christopher McGrath (SUCF), Hicks Stone (Stone Architecture), Brian Kelley (Mach Architecture + Engineering)

1. New Housing Construction – Selection of Colors for Pre-cast Concrete Façade

APAAC is being asked to make final selections regarding the colors for the exterior of the buildings.

- John Giarrusso opened the agenda item by summarizing earlier discussion with APAAC regarding façade colors, specifically the strong desire by APAAC to avoid Podium-like tones of off-white and grey. Rather, the committee had previously asked to ensure that the colors would be ‘warm’ and more akin to colors found in nature.
- Accordingly, Diana Delp, campus project manager and architect on this project, had worked with the building designers to narrow down color options to the 4 concrete samples brought to the meeting for comment and selection.
- The four colors were discussed, including the more green/brown option (option “C”) that was preferred by the housing project working committee as well as the architects on the project.
- Some in the committee would seek a livelier color (such as the purplish tones in option “D”) as a welcoming contrast to the grays of winter, somewhat similar to more vibrant colors of Empire Commons.
- Others were concerned that too lively a color, against the massing of the buildings, would be overwhelming and argued for the more neutral tones. They countered that Empire Commons’ colors have received a fair amount of its own criticisms.
- The conversation around the committee centered on the need to see these samples under various conditions: in the light of day, during cloudy periods, and under snowy conditions.
- The next step, prior to final selection, was to fabricate a larger sample of the two finalist colors (C and D) for placement and viewing outside. Additional renderings would be sought as well.

2. Installing Large Electronic Display In Front of the Campus Center

APAAC is being asked to comment regarding a concept proposal by the Student Association to purchase and install a large electronic message board on the exterior of the Campus Center, as shown in the rendering below.

- Justin Wax Jacobs, SA President and member of APAAC, presented the concept of the electronic display board as a means to facilitate improved communication to the student body regarding events and other opportunities for participation.
- He explained that the location was selected after conferring with Campus Center operations staff as being the most viable area for such a large board. Moreover, he thought the message board would enliven the campus and provide color and technological modernization.
- While recognizing that communication is indeed a challenge, most of the APAAC group did not favor the prominent location and scale of the electronic board.
- Criticisms included: the need to install unsightly surface mounted electric and data wire molds on the columns and a power zone/disconnect box in front of the Campus Center; the fact that the scale of the board would be so prominent as to make the front of the Campus Center somewhat akin to “center field scoreboard” in a ball park; the placement of the board would block views out from the Campus Center’s
upper levels and the view and light distribution of the historic saucer fixture behind; and the likelihood that the State’s historic preservation agency would reject the proposal.

- There was overwhelming consensus that APAAC, as guided by the Campus Heritage Preservation Plan [http://www.albany.edu/facilities/documents/UAlbany%20Campus%20Heritage%20Preservation%20Plan%20-%20for%20public%20web%20viewing.pdf](http://www.albany.edu/facilities/documents/UAlbany%20Campus%20Heritage%20Preservation%20Plan%20-%20for%20public%20web%20viewing.pdf), would need to reject the concept as presented as misplaced and inappropriate.
- Other options, such as multiple synchronized boards in other interior and exterior locations, were discussed; and the Facilities Office’s architects and planners, as indicated by John Giarrusso, would meet with Student Association to help conceptualize these potential installations.

3. **Review of Concepts for Renovation and Upgrade of Main Fountain and Surrounding LC Area**

APAAC is being asked to comment and provide feedback regarding concepts to rethink the main fountain and fountain deck area. This entire area, including the water tower, is scheduled for renovation due to longstanding maintenance deficiencies; and since there will be significant rebuilding, there lies great opportunity to beautify and make more functional this central area of campus.

- Christopher McGrath (SUCF) discussed the genesis of the project and the opportunity at this time to improve on aspects of the fountain and Lecture Center concourse areas.
- Brian Kelley (Mach A+E) presented slides on the preferred concept that had emerged from the campus working group on this fountain/tower upgrade.
- The preferred concept, as shown the rendering below, includes multiple recessed, programmable and lighted water jets (similar to the Entry Plaza fountain). It includes landscaping and a ‘greening’ of the fountain deck areas as well as major energy efficiency upgrades to the window walls between the LC’s and the fountain. The standing water level of the fountain area, as envisioned, would be reduced from 18” at its current deepest to only 9”. Benches, indoor and outdoor seating, and flexible integration of outdoor and indoor activities could be provided.
- The objective of the working group on this project was to provide a “greener” fountain area that would be attractive and welcoming year-round, including the winter.
There was general consensus among APAAC that such upgrades, described above, are desirable and no substantive changes or amendments to the basic elements of the plan were offered.

For historic preservation purposes, the location, size, and scale of the fountain and the surrounding hardscapes is being maintained largely in their current form.

Most of the discussion, however, focused on the center element that was conceptualized for the fountain: a walking path and center water (and/or flame or light) feature with surrounding seat wall.

This center feature, as manifested from comments from the project’s working group, is intended to engage greater activity, participation, and appreciation for the fountain by allowing the campus community to get closer and actually walk through the fountain and sit in the middle of it.

Having a center feature, too, is viewed as the architectural center to the formal grid pattern on which the Podium and the center quads are based.

APAAC members largely endorsed this idea.

There were significant concerns, however, regarding the width of the center path and the likelihood that the path would be a convenient pedestrian north-south cut-through that would be congested during peak times, such as between classes during warmer weather.

APAAC discussed whether the path would be able to resolve whether it becomes a ‘means of circulation’ or a ‘place to hang out’. There was no real consensus with the group on this matter, but most thought it would resolve itself with time; and that if there was pedestrian congestion, it would regulate itself.

An alternate idea for consideration, however, would be to perhaps only allow entry to the center feature through one leg of a path, sort of akin to a ‘lollipop stick.’ This idea would be considered by campus planners for development with the working group.
Another concern raised by APAAC was criticism of the notion of adding a flame or fire feature in the center of the envisioned circle feature of the fountain. The thought by the working group was that some warm element (fire or flame) would draw participation to the fountain in the colder times of the year.

Most on APAAC, however, were concerned with the safety risks of such a concept, even if a flame were somehow elevated on a higher pedestal.

The notion of a flame and what exactly would be designed for the center element would be reconsidered by campus planners and the architect team.