



May 15, 2012

Philadelphia City Planning Commission
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

RE: 230-50 North Columbus Boulevard; Proposed Marina View Apartments

Dear Commission Members:

The Central Delaware Advocacy Group (CDAG) is excited by the recent influx of development proposals focused on the Central Delaware district. As an active participant in the creation of the Master Plan for the Central Delaware, CDAG endeavors to offer constructive comment on each new development proposal from the perspective of its conformity, or non-conformity, with the principles of the Master Plan recently adopted by this Commission.

The following are our comments:

- Design Concept – The proposed residential high-rise tower is placed on a three-story podium base of structured parking, with only approximately 50% of the Columbus Boulevard street frontage dedicated to pedestrian-friendly commercial activity. Further, nearly 70% of the linear street frontage of the entire structure will present as parking garage or loading area garage, not at all the active pedestrian-level uses intended by the Master Plan.
- Building Massing – The placement of the 130-foot high residential tower directly along Columbus Boulevard effectively obscures view of the historic Benjamin Franklin Bridge anchorage. Unlike previous development programs for this site, this proposal makes no attempt to respect the iconic architecture of the bridge or preserve views from the roadway or pedestrian path. Some set-back of the upper floors of the east edge of the structure seems an appropriate remedial effort.
- Street Level Urban Design – In order to meet flood plain requirements, the building is set significantly above street level revealing a 5'-6" tall blank wall along the west sidewalk of Columbus Boulevard. This pedestrian-unfriendly wall at the sidewalk line is decidedly not in keeping with the intent of the Master Plan to create a more enhanced pedestrian experience all along the Central Delaware.

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- Water Street Re-Paving – The developer is proposing to re-construct the Belgian Block street paving for only 100 feet back from the Vine Street intersection to facilitate access to the project's loading docks. Given the disruption and potential further paving damage that may be done to the presently deteriorated granite block surface it would seem appropriate that the city mandate full street reconstruction, including granite block surfacing, as was required by the developer of National West on Bread Street north of Arch Street to Quarry. Alternatively, the city could partner with the developer to complete reconstruction of historic Water Street.
- Screening of Parking Structure – The proposed inadequate landscaping plan at Water Street leaves the parking structure unscreened and renders the pedestrian experience unfriendly, especially for the River's Edge residential community, who frequent this route. Enhancement of the landscaping plan could easily mitigate the negative impact of the exposed parking structure.
- Project Aesthetics – Aesthetics are certainly subjective, however, this design is singularly unimaginative in its general massing scheme, unarticulated façade planes, and material pallet inferred to date. As such, at this time, the project appears to suffer from lack of effort.

Marina View is the first major development proposal to come forward since the Planning Commission unanimously adopted the Master Plan on March 6 of this year. The Master Plan is now official Planning Commission, and City, policy. If the Master Plan is to become a reality, it must become the standard against which each development proposal along the Central Delaware is measured. We therefore believe it is incumbent upon the Commission to apply it rigorously, and we call on the Commission to urge the development team to improve this proposal, in every possible way, to conform to the principles and goals of the Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important development proposal.

On behalf of the Board of CDAG,



Matthew Ruben
Chair, Central Delaware Advocacy Group

c. Mr. Carl Primavera, for Ensemble Real Estate (via email)