



December 4, 2024

Caroline Skuncik, Executive Director  
I-195 Redevelopment District Commission  
225 Dyer Street, Fourth Floor  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Parcel 5 Finalists Design Review Panel Comments**

Design Review Panel Contributors:

- Craig Barton, Design Review Panel
- Emily Vogler, Design Review Panel
- Jack Ryan, Design Review Panel
- Tim Love, Utile
- Zoë Mueller, Utile
- Kevin Chong, Utile

Dear Caroline,

Utile and the I-195 Redevelopment District Design Review Panel convened on November 18, 2024 to discuss the design proposals for Parcel 5 submitted by the three development teams shortlisted by the District Commission. The Panel reviewed the submitted documents and evaluated the proposals based on their overall urban design merits. The reviewed proposals are listed below:

- Proposal by Bluedog Capital Partners
- Proposal by Providence Art & Design Center
- Proposal by Transom Real Estate

In addition to these three proposals, the Design Review Panel also reviewed a proposal by EQT Exeter. However, the comments on this proposal are not included in this memo because the development team has subsequently withdrawn their proposal.

This pre-selection review is not intended to replace the detailed design review process, which will be conducted in partnership with the selected developer. Instead, the goal of providing design feedback at this stage is to assist the Commission in identifying which development team demonstrates the greatest potential to deliver a compelling, context-sensitive design for the site that best aligns with the District's Development Plan objectives, based on the approach each team has taken thus far.

Each proposal represents a unique vision for the site. The Design Review Panel focused on comparing the teams' approaches to key elements such as building massing, public realm activation, and parking design. Additionally, the Design Review Panel evaluated each proposal for its cost viability and vulnerability to value engineering. We have provided detailed comments below to inform the Commission's selection of a preferred development team.

## Proposal by Bluedog Capital Partners (with ZDS)

### Building Massing & Materiality

1. The scale and appearance of the building feel out of context with the surrounding area. Despite being a similar size to the other proposals, the building appears too large and overwhelming, especially along South Water Street. The repetitive architectural expression of the upper levels stretches across the entire parcel frontage with little massing articulation or material variation. While the mid-block promenade provides more outdoor space at ground level, it does little to soften the building's perceived scale at eye level.
2. At seven stories, this design would require a waiver from the maximum building height zoning requirement.
3. The material palette, which consists mostly of expansive floor-to-ceiling storefronts and wooden screens, does not seem compatible with the character of the existing neighborhood.

### Public Realm Activation

1. The Design Review Panel appreciates the active uses along the building edges, including restaurant, retail, fitness, and residential amenity uses along both South Water Street and South Main Street.
2. While the mid-block promenade is visually interesting, it is not oriented toward any park entrance or major street intersection, and its functionality as a pedestrian space is unclear. Furthermore, much of the promenade serves as a driveway and could be reimaged for a more pedestrian-friendly configuration.

### Parking Design

The majority of the parking spaces are located on the second level and the basement level, freeing up most of the ground level to accommodate more active uses.

### Vulnerability to Value Engineering

The extensive use of glazing, underground parking, and curvilinear massing in the proposal present a high vulnerability to value engineering measures that could compromise the design intent of the project.

## Proposal by Providence Art & Design Center (Ionic Development Co. & Wade | Keating)

### Building Massing & Materiality

1. The massing is generally visually appealing and engaging. The gabled roof forms are well-received, while the mid-block flat roof design is less successful.
2. Although the inner pedestrian street and mid-block connection are positive massing gestures that provide more public open space at the ground plane, the two massing bars, separated only by the 24-foot inner pedestrian street, may not offer adequate space for light and air to serve the inner residential units, which account for nearly half of all units. Additionally, since these inner units face each other, the massing and facade designs should be further calibrated to ensure adequate privacy for residents.
3. Some Design Review Panelists are concerned that the amount of facade articulation may appear dated in a short time and question whether the extensive massing complexity is truly necessary.

### Public Realm Activation

1. The proposed mid-block connection and inner pedestrian street align with pedestrian desire lines more successfully than in the Bluedog proposal.
2. While the design team's effort in activating the private inner pedestrian street with retail spaces is appreciated, the programming of the inner ground-level spaces should be carefully considered to attract enough visitors to activate the area as a destination.
3. The inner pedestrian street appears too narrow to allow for enough daylight. Additionally, given the weather conditions in Providence, the vibrant atmosphere depicted in the renders seems unrealistic for portions of the year. Activating this inner street during winter would require thoughtfully planned design strategies.
4. Despite the large amount of public open space depicted in the interior of the site, the design does not demonstrate the same level of effort in providing street wall articulation and street furniture along the public street edges on the exterior of the building to respond to the surrounding context and the adjacent park.

### Parking Design

This proposal provides significantly fewer parking spaces than the other proposals. Furthermore, the dimensions of the parking stalls and drive aisles depicted in the basement floor plan appear unrealistic. Both observations suggest that the parking configuration might not have been fully resolved.

### Vulnerability to Value Engineering

The underground parking presents a risk of value engineering measures that could compromise the design intent of the project.

## Proposal by Transom Real Estate (with Howeler+Yoon)

### Building Massing & Materiality

1. The massing shaped by five carve-out courtyards is dynamic and visually engaging. The Design Review Panel appreciates the plasticity of the facade, which effectively breaks down the scale of the massing, creating corresponding courtyards at both the ground and upper levels.
2. The carve-outs are deeper and wider on the South Main Street side than on the South Water Street side. The design team may want to consider re-orienting these larger carve-outs towards South Water Street to optimize river views. Additionally, extending the carve-outs to the ground level in more areas could help provide more generous public realm spaces.
3. The exterior material palette of brick-colored and gray preformed aluminum panels is visually interesting and complementary to the existing context.

### Public Realm Activation

1. The retail uses at the north and south corners of South Water Street as well as the mid-block residential lobby help activate the public realm along the street.
2. While the sculptural quality of the massing is appreciated, the scales of the resulting carve-out courtyards are less convincing, with little imagery depicting how the ground-level and upper-level courtyards would be occupied. The ground-level courtyards appear more as pass-through areas rather than spaces for gathering and should be reimagined for greater activation.
3. The location of the residential lobby should be reconsidered due to the tight spatial constraints created by the massing concept.
4. While retail uses are proposed at the north and south corners of South Main Street, the majority of the street frontage is designated as a flat sidewalk gallery that functions as a screen for the parking program. This results in a significant length of inactive street edge, which should be reconsidered. Relocating the ground level residential lobby could ease spatial restrictions in the east-west direction, freeing up depth for more active uses along South Main Street.

### Parking Design

The one-story parking podium occupies most of the site and provides an efficient parking layout. However, this limits opportunities for more generous carve-out public realm spaces and results in the lack of activation on South Main Street.

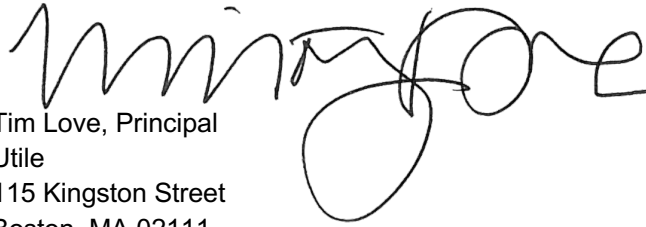
### Vulnerability to Value Engineering

1. The use of an above-grade parking podium enhances the overall feasibility of the project and reduces the risk of excessive value engineering.
2. The potential value engineering risks with the curvilinear massing are possibly mitigated by the efficiency of the double-loaded corridor residential floor plates.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions or would like additional information on any of these comments.

**utile**

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Love". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tim" and last name "Love" clearly distinguishable.

Tim Love, Principal  
Utile  
115 Kingston Street  
Boston, MA 02111