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City critiques plans for Hilton's millennial-driven hotel near Little Italy

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The design of a new millennial-branded hotel in the works north of Harbor East will have to go back to the drawing table.

That's the advice of the city's design panel that studied schematics for Tru, a modern, Hilton property planned for a parking lot at 415 S. Central Ave. next to Little Italy.

Tru is aimed at housing guests from the millennial generation with a smart phone check-in system, smaller, efficient rooms at \$100 a night or less and open spaces. The Central Avenue hotel is being developed by Indiana-based Holladay Properties.



K2M DESIGN

The preliminary design for Tru, a modern hotel by Hilton to be built at 415 S. Central Ave., was scrutinized by UDARP.

The look and vibe of Tru is modern, cubic and edgy, K2M Design architects told the Urban Design & Architecture Review Panel on Thursday.

The firm designed it to rise eight stories with large industrial windows in the guest rooms to mimic the look of an adjacent converted warehouse, Fallsway Spring, at Eastern and Central avenues next door where the offices of online marketing agency Groove and a Clark Burger are located.

Hilton (NYSE: HLT) created the Tru brand in 2016. Its mission is to offer a more affordable hotel and is designed with a younger traveler in mind.

The designs presented to UDARP show a first floor with lots of open space and several seating areas to encourage public gathering near a bar and restaurant area. There will be 20 guest rooms per floor and the entire structure will jet close to 97 feet into the skyline. Overall, it will compliment another hotel in the next block, the 208-room Hyatt Place, in its design that is not too overpowering for the existing rowhouses and businesses in the area.

UDARP members debated the designs, and voted to send them back for revisions. They asked K2M to return with new drawings at a future meeting.

The main issues were making the large industrial windows more uniform and the street entrance more "urban" and inviting for a younger generation with larger windows and a more open feel from Central Avenue.

"It's not inviting," UDARP member Pavlina Ilieva said about the entryway. "You have an opportunity to create a true urban experience here."

Another UDARP member, Richard Burns, asked the design team to go back to Hilton to try to get some of the changes in the look approved.

"I know dealing with hotels is not easy. They are very tough customers," Burns said. "Go beyond what they would say to be their instinct to build a hotel at an airport — you have an obligation to respect the context of where it is located."

Austin Haynes, a senior vice president at Holladay Properties, agreed.

"These are great comments and we will happily try to work within them," he told the group.

Melody Simmons

Reporter

Baltimore Business Journal

