

DOWNTOWN - A board of top local architects says early designs for the \$200 million Horseshoe Casino Cincinnati downtown lack the architectural appeal they had hoped to see.

Executives with developer Rock Gaming presented preliminary designs for the incoming casino to Cincinnati's Urban Design Review Board on Tuesday. The five-member board critiques plans for

high-profile downtown projects to ensure they fit the city's urban fabric.

Rock Gaming voluntarily agreed to share its design plans with the board. The developers are not obligated to abide by the design board's recommendations.

Leading the interior and exterior design for the 354,000-square-foot casino and attached 2,500-car parking garage is Las Vegas-based Friedmutter Group and local architects with downtown-based KZF Design Inc. and WA Inc.

□ [Photos: What Cincinnati's casino might look like](#)

Developers say design plans for the casino at Broadway Commons offer up an opportunity unlike any other in the nation.

"There isn't a casino in the U.S. that has tried to be welcoming to pedestrians," said Steve Rosenthal, a principal at Rock Gaming. "That just hasn't been the model. We've taken a long hard look at all sides of this casino."

While more than 90 percent of the Horseshoe's visitors are expected to arrive by car and park at the attached garage just off Gilbert Avenue, designers want the casino's main pedestrian entrance off of Reading and Broadway to have "a dramatic sense of arrival," casino general manager Kevin Kline said.

"The driving force behind this program is to create a critical mass," he said.

Designs on Tuesday showed the entrance to be made mostly of glass, but Rosenthal said his team is considering alternatives.

Designers also are still working to finalize exterior materials, which likely will include limestone and brick, Rosenthal said. Renderings show the casino's exterior to be lined with up to four restaurants, including a steak house and buffet. Each restaurant is offset by different materials - giving the impression that they are separate buildings lined side by side.

Renderings also showed the casino to have varying elevations - ranging from 25 feet to more than 45 feet tall. But the early designs need more attention and focus, in the opinion of the review board.

"There is a real opportunity here, but I'm a little concerned that it's kind of a collage of disparate pieces," said board member John Senhauser. "There should be some totality, a common theme about it. I'm not sure we understand the whole strategy."

Likewise, board member Jay Chatterjee called the casino's exterior "hodge-podge forms."

"I'm trying to get a sense of the totality, but I'm not getting it," he said.

Senhauser and other members also expressed concerns that lighting from the casino and parking garage - which will rise above Interstate 71 - could be unsightly and a nuisance to nearby residents if it's not done correctly.

Rosenthal said he'd take the opinions back to his design team.

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