

TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD

TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

May 24, 2022, 7 p.m.,

Legislative Chambers

**Re Application on Behalf of Arhaus, Inc,
Lessee of a Portion of 1500/1502 New Britain
Avenue, More Commonly Known as Westfarms
Mall.**

A p p e a r a n c e s:

Town Council Members Present:

MAYOR SHARI CANTOR

LEON DAVIDOFF

MARK ZYDANOWICZ

ALBERTO CORTES

ADRIENNE BILLINGS-SMITH

(via telephone)

CAROL BLANKS

BEN WENOGRAD

LIAM SWEENEY

MARY FAY

TODD DUMAIS

Town Planner

ESSIE LABROT

Town Clerk

A p p e a r a n c e s: (cont'd)

For the Applicant:

ALTER & PEARSON, LLC

701 Hebron Avenue

Glastonbury, CT 06033

By: GREGORY W. PIECUCH, ESQ.

RPearson@alterpearson.com

860.652.4020

1 **PRESIDENT CANTOR:** It is now
2 seven o'clock. So we can begin our 7 p.m.
3 public hearing.

4 This is an Application on
5 behalf of Arhaus, Inc, lessee of a portion of
6 1500/1502 New Britain Avenue, more commonly
7 known as Westfarms Mall. The application
8 seeks to amend the Special Development
9 District SDD Number 12 to accommodate
10 exterior architectural signage and site
11 improvements for a new Arhaus Furniture
12 Store. I think in Denmark it's called
13 Urh-hoos [phonetic], but you can correct me
14 if I'm wrong.

15 So we will start with a roll
16 call, Ms. Labrot.

17 **THE CLERK:**

18 Ms. Billings-Smith?

19 **COUNCILOR BILLINGS-SMITH:**

20 (Via telephone) Present.

21 **THE CLERK:** Ms. Blanks?

22 **COUNCILOR BLANKS:** Present.

23 **THE CLERK:** Ms. Cantor?

24 **PRESIDENT CANTOR:** Here.

25 **THE CLERK:** Mr. Cortes?

COUNCILOR CORTES: Here.

THE CLERK: Mr. Davidoff?

COUNCILOR DAVIDOFF: Here.

THE CLERK: Ms. Fay?

COUNCILOR FAY: Present.

THE CLERK: Mr. Sweeney?

COUNCILOR SWEENEY: Here.

THE CLERK: Mr. Wenograd?

COUNCILOR WENOGRAD:

Here.

THE CLERK: And

Mr. Zydanowicz?

COUNCILOR ZYDANOWICZ: Here.

THE CLERK: Thank you.

**PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you,
Ms. Labrot.**

**We will begin with a
presentation from the applicant.**

Good evening, Ms. Pearson.

**MS. PEARSON: Good evening,
Madam Mayor and members of the Town Council.
My name is Robin Pearson. I'm an attorney
with the law firm of Alter & Pearson in
Glastonbury, Connecticut. And I'm pleased to
be here this evening on behalf of the**

1 applicant -- two applicants, Arhaus Inc, and
2 Arhaus, LLC, which is the lessee for the
3 space in which it hopes to occupy at West
4 Farms Mall.

5 The application requests
6 permission to be able to make not
7 insignificant improvements to the exterior of
8 the mall itself in space that was, for the
9 was part, previously occupied by Ruby
10 Tuesday's, a restaurant that left in March of
11 2017 -- which was almost three years ago. So
12 this space has been vacant, or black, or dark
13 for that long.

14 You may recall that the Town
15 Council approved an application for Maggie
16 McFly's for this location back in 2020. And
17 then COVID hit and a lot of things changed.
18 So they did not go forward with the project.
19 That application also proposed some
20 significant changes to the facade, and you
21 were comfortable with approving it.

22 So the reason we are here is
23 only because we are making changes to the
24 exterior of West Farms Mall. The uses are
25 allowed and if they were making absolutely no

1 changes to the exterior they could put the
2 store in without coming to you for a change
3 to the special development district.

4 Also part of this application
5 are some minor changes to the parking area,
6 which I'll go through for you -- but I want
7 to just note for you that those were, in
8 fact, approved as part of the 2020
9 application for the Maggie McFly Restaurant,
10 but they were never installed because Maggie
11 McFly's did not go forward.

12 So you've already looked
13 favorably upon those, but we're showing them
14 again as part of this application. So
15 they'll be at the plans themselves that are
16 filed on record at the Town Clerk's office.

17 So with me this evening -- I
18 would like to tell you who is here -- Nikki
19 Edmiston has just flown in today from Ohio.
20 She is the Director of Real Estate Operations
21 for Arhaus, Inc. And she's going to say a
22 few words on behalf of her company with
23 regard to this application.

24 Also flying in TODAY from Ohio
25 is Luis Pupo who is the architect with RDL

1 Architects. And he came in from Shaker
2 Heights, and they do all the design work for
3 Arhaus Stores.

4 David Ziaks is here this
5 evening. David is a civil engineer. He's
6 been before you many times, as he, his firm
7 FA Hesketh & Associates out of East Granby
8 have been the civil engineers of record on
9 the West Farms Mall applications over the
10 years. So he has a long history with regard
11 to this, to this site.

12 I have provided the affidavit
13 of sign posting. It's already on file with
14 the Town Clerk. I'm going to do a quick site
15 overview and update for you of the agency and
16 staff reviews of this proposal. And I'll
17 touch on the outreach effort that we've made
18 with regard to the application.

19 Then Nikki Edmiston is going
20 to tell you a little bit about Arhaus because
21 it is an exciting tenant to come into our
22 community. And the more we can tell you
23 about it, the better that is.

24 Then Luis Pupo will go through
25 the architectural changes that are proposed.

1 And then Dave Ziaks is here to answer any
2 questions you have, but as it is pretty
3 simple he doesn't need to get up -- but he's
4 delighted to answer anything that may come
5 up. And I'll just make a few concluding
6 remarks.

7 So I'd like to turn now -- you
8 have in front of you the cover of the plans
9 that were submitted. I'm going to go to --
10 this is the location plan that is on the
11 cover page of the plan set. We blew it up
12 for you so that you can just get a good feel
13 for the mall, which you're all familiar with,
14 but we wanted to show you the mall in the
15 context of the neighborhood setting.

16 This is New Britain Avenue
17 running north-south, and this location that
18 is circled is the place where the Arhaus
19 Furniture Store will be located.

20 And you can see that there is
21 a strong residential neighborhood to the east
22 of the mall. We did send out an outreach
23 letter, I would call it, which is part of
24 your packet which described the proposal, and
25 what we contemplated doing with this

1 application. And it also included a
2 rendering and a location plan showing where
3 the store is going and what it was going to
4 look like.

5 In that mailing we encouraged
6 anybody who had any questions or concerns to
7 contact my office. We have had absolutely no
8 public input with regard to this application.
9 And the last time I checked as of this
10 morning with the Town Clerk's office, they
11 too have received no calls. And I think the
12 same is true for the planning office; as of
13 contact this morning they have received no
14 increase.

15 With regard to this
16 application the only thing else I wanted to
17 point out with this plan is that, of course,
18 the storefronts on New Britain Avenue. The
19 next sheet is a close-up, a line drawing.
20 It's LP1. It's part of the plan set. It
21 shows you exactly where the Arhaus Store is
22 going to be located. It's between the
23 entrance to the mall and Macy's Men's and
24 Furniture Store.

25 You can also see there the

1 proposed site improvements which are the --
2 it's the crosswalk that comes down to an
3 existing island and that island, again
4 previously approved, is going to be upgraded
5 to substitute handicapped parking spaces for
6 the regular spaces that are there now. It's
7 a loss of five parking spaces, but it's a
8 gain of a lot of green landscaping also.

9 And the other thing that's
10 interesting I just wanted to show you -- I'm
11 sure you're aware -- is this is the town line
12 that runs through the mall. Most of the mall
13 is in Farmington. Some of the mall is in
14 West Hartford. And small pieces of this
15 proposed store location are in Farmington.

16 I've spoken with Farmington
17 staff. You know no permitting was required
18 for it, and of course they're quite
19 comfortable with what is being proposed.

20 This is a close-up of the site
21 plan changes. Again it's referencing LA-1,
22 which is the landscaping plan that's in your
23 packet and it shows the crosswalk. The green
24 area, the area that's been turned green with
25 that overlay will now be open space

1 landscaping, and there will be three
2 handicapped parking spaces where cars are now
3 shown.

4 With regard to what's
5 happening in front of the Arhaus Store, that
6 greenery that's shown right against the
7 building now will be removed and the sidewalk
8 will be continued directly up to the front of
9 the store. Landscaping on this side, it's in
10 the sort of dumpster area that services the
11 mall on this side -- will be upgraded.

12 The tree that exists on this
13 side will stay and there will be additional
14 upgraded landscaping there.

15 And again, those changes to
16 the parking lot were previously approved.
17 I'd now like to bring your attention to what
18 the mall looks like today at that location,
19 and I'm going to ask our architect to come on
20 up and go through the changes that are
21 proposed.

22 And then when he finishes --
23 oh, you know what? I'm sorry. I wanted to
24 start with -- I apologize. So Nikki is from
25 Arhaus -- is going to tell you a little bit

1 Arhaus first.

2 NICOLE EDMISTON: Good
3 evening. As you may or may not know, Arhaus
4 was founded in 1986 by John and Jack Reed.
5 Arhaus does offer luxury home furnishings and
6 decor from modern stylings to traditional
7 stylings.

8 We chose West Farms because we
9 do perform very well in the Northeast, and
10 after looking at this market we realized that
11 it's under saturated with a luxury quality
12 furnishings offering. The demographics for
13 the area also align well with our core
14 customer, and some early traffic readings
15 that we've done for the mall are very
16 encouraging.

17 Currently we operate 79 stores
18 throughout the United States, and we have
19 four that are scheduled to open this year.
20 And for West Farms we anticipate construction
21 beginning at the end of June and opening
22 potentially in May of 2023. Questions?

23 MS. PEARSON: The only thing
24 in Connecticut, you have a store now?

25 NICOLE EDMISTON: We do. It's

1 in Norwalk, Connecticut at the SoNo Mall. It
2 does very well for us.

3 MS. PEARSON: Thank you.

4 And Mr. Pupo?

5 LUIS PUPO: Good evening. My
6 name is Luis Pupo. I'm the Senior Project
7 Manager for RDL Architects. We do the
8 majority, if not all of the Arhaus; have been
9 for quite a few years.

10 Arhaus aesthetics is one of
11 clean modern lines comprised of a handful of
12 carefully curated material such as COR-TEN,
13 quarried natural, ipe hardwood and aluminum
14 composite materials. The composition of
15 materials and clean lines has become
16 synonymous with the Arhaus national brand.

17 The Arhaus project at West
18 Farms proposes to replace monochromatic
19 monolithic composition with one that unifies
20 both the upper and lower levels of the mall
21 and provides a dynamic interplay between the
22 Arhaus pallet of materials and the openings
23 to the interior space. We feel the result
24 will invigorate, activate and be a welcome
25 presence in this area of the mall.

1 Obviously, this is what's
2 currently there. The previous tenant really
3 only addressed the lower level of the mall.
4 On the upper level of the mall in that
5 particular area there's a service corridor.
6 So there really is no tenant that would be
7 facing outward there.

8 So what we've proposed -- if
9 you could go to the next slide -- again
10 another shot of that same sort of entry
11 portal and low fenestration along the east
12 facade.

13 Next. So what we are
14 proposing is basically to bring that whole
15 elevation together and address the entirety
16 of it, upper and lower level. And then this
17 would give it a much greater presence next to
18 that newly constructed entry to the left.

19 So if we start on the southern
20 elevation, right immediately to the mall
21 entry we start with the aluminum composite
22 material which acts as a buffer between the
23 mall materiality and the beginning of the
24 Arhaus Furniture. Then it moves into the
25 natural quarried stone that is particularly

1 blended for Arhaus.

2 And then we move into that
3 corner element which then brings some
4 fenestration and gives you a shot into the
5 materials and products that our Arhaus sells
6 within. The border of that corner element is
7 aluminum composite metal panel. It's got a
8 couple of eyebrow canopies, some signage.
9 Above that we have the COR-TEN weathering
10 material.

11 And on the upper level we've
12 got a mixture of false fenestration, because
13 obviously there's a service corridor. So we
14 couldn't open real fenestration into that
15 service corridor, but we've mixed it with the
16 aluminum composite panel which is that dusty
17 charcoal and some spandrel panels along the
18 east elevation as well as along the north,
19 the north elevation.

20 And so as we progress along
21 the east elevation it's sort of that same
22 interplay. We come back to the quarried
23 stone. Some more fenestration would allow
24 the activity that's occurring inside to come
25 outside, and vice versa.

1 And at the center of the
2 elevation we have our entry. On either side
3 of that entry is the ipe which is a natural
4 hardwood, and it's left in that state. All
5 we do is put a sealer on it to prevent from
6 fading over time.

7 And then we repeat that
8 mixture of quarried stone, composite metal
9 panel and then COR-TEN right as you turn
10 towards the north elevation. And then a
11 large area of fenestration again to begin to
12 activate and bring that inboard, that
13 activity interior to the exterior.

14 I really think that this
15 brings that whole elevation together and
16 addresses both upper and lower levels.

17 Here's a night shot. All of
18 the lighting you see there is carefully
19 controlled so that none of it goes astray and
20 provides any light pollution that sometimes
21 people find objectionable. So it all is
22 Bluetooth controlled. I think it accentuates
23 the architecture well. Any questions?

24 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Ms. Fay?

25 COUNCILOR FAY: Thank you. I

1 was just curious about the layout of the
2 store. Is it two stories or is it just --

3 LUIS PUPO: It's one story.

4 COUNCILOR FAY: It's just one
5 story with just gigantic ceilings?

6 LUIS PUPO: Correct.

7 COUNCILOR FAY: And how many
8 square feet is it?

9 LUIS PUPO: It is
10 approximately 11,000 square feet.

11 COUNCILOR FAY: Okay. Thank
12 you.

13 LUIS PUPO: It's about five or
14 six current tenant spaces all made into one.

15 MS. PEARSON: Thank you. And
16 of course, he would be available to answer
17 any other questions once we conclude.

18 I don't have a lot more to
19 add. I'm going to just make a few remarks
20 with regard to the application just to close
21 it out.

22 Up on the screen now is a
23 slide showing the juxtaposition between what
24 exists today and what we hope you're going to
25 approve. We think it's a huge improvement

1 and we were talking about it out in the hall
2 before we came in.

3 And we were just talking about
4 the fact that, you know, malls today are
5 facing all kinds of challenges. And it's a
6 credit to Farmington and West Hartford that
7 this mall is still able to attract very, you
8 know, exciting high-end distinctive tenants
9 to come in and make a serious investment in
10 that mall, and really inject a lot of
11 vitality and life to the exterior. And
12 again, contribute in a big way to the
13 commercial and retail aspects of this part of
14 New Britain Avenue.

15 I'd like to just summarize
16 where we are with regard to staff reviews.
17 You should have in your materials a signoff
18 dated May 9 from the Planning Department,
19 which says all technical comments or concerns
20 have been addressed.

21 Engineering found that the
22 application is acceptable. I should also
23 note that the signage does conform to
24 existing signage. There are no waivers, if
25 you will -- it's the wrong term, but there

1 are no changes to the zoning standards that
2 are requested with this particular
3 application.

4 The Health District has signed
5 off. The Public Works Department has said
6 that there are no issues with the
7 application, and you do have a memo from the
8 Fire Marshal saying there are no issues with
9 the proposal.

10 And the Police Department says
11 that since this is replacing previously
12 existing retail space and has no impact on
13 the parking lot or entrance to the mall, I do
14 not believe it will negatively impact police
15 services to the area.

16 That's supplemented by the two
17 recommendations that have come in from Town
18 Plan and Zoning Commission, which unanimously
19 voted at its meeting on May 2 to recommend
20 approval of this application, finding it
21 consistent with the plan of conservation and
22 development; and the Design Review Advisory
23 Committee at its meeting on April 21.

24 And we did have an informal
25 with DRAC also; said that during it's

1 discussion and deliberation on this matter
2 the committee specifically noted the
3 following. The proposed design will
4 architecturally enliven an otherwise large
5 and unactivated facade of the mall. The
6 committee appreciates the applicant's active
7 participation in the design review process,
8 including an informal review session and
9 ultimate consideration and inclusion of the
10 DRAC comments in the revised and final design
11 of the project.

12 And DRAC was the one, that it
13 had asked us to do the rendering, nighttime
14 rendering because they felt as beautiful as
15 it is in the daytime, they thought at
16 nighttime it was going to shine even more and
17 be really a benefit for the mall area.

18 So with that, I will refer you
19 to our application which does go through the
20 findings that need to be made. Clearly, I
21 think -- and I won't go through them all, but
22 other than to say, you know, this clearly
23 meets the standards of Section 177-44B
24 because it is a reinvestment in the West
25 Farms Mall, an existing facility in town.

1 It's a continuation of the
2 uses that are allowed, and it's definitely a
3 design plan that is a very positive superior
4 plan. So with all of that we welcome any
5 comments that you have, and look forward to a
6 positive vote.

7 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you,
8 Attorney Pearson. Can we just make sure -- I
9 don't think there's anyone signed up, but I
10 just want to see if there's any public
11 comment.

12 In the meantime, any questions
13 for Attorney Pearson? Ms. Blanks?

14 COUNCILOR BLANKS: Thank you,
15 Madam Mayor. Attorney Pearson, just a quick
16 question on the beautiful lighting facade
17 that you all developed. How does that dim
18 down after hours for the mall? Just a
19 concern for neighbors across the way.

20 MS. PEARSON: I'm going to ask
21 the architect to answer that question. I
22 know that in DRAC it came up. And we said it
23 would be controlled and it's on a timer, but
24 I don't know if there's anything else that
25 needs to be added.

1 You would have to come up and
2 identify yourself for the record, and get
3 your voice on tape.

4 LUIS PUPPO: Luis Pupo with RDL
5 Architects. As I mentioned during my
6 presentation, all of the lighting is
7 Bluetooth controlled. So you can turn it up.
8 You can turn it down to levels -- if it's
9 found that it's objectionable, or they could
10 definitely be turned down.

11 So it's not, you turn it on
12 and it's one static illumination level. It
13 can be turned down as well as up, as needed.

14 MS. PEARSON: But I would also
15 like to add that clearly the way it's
16 designed, it's not going to be creeping all
17 over the property line and going towards the
18 neighborhood at all.

19 And we do already, you know,
20 there's lighting out on New Britain Avenue in
21 that general location for the sign itself for
22 West Farms Mall. And DRAC did kind of think
23 about that, but they still thought that this
24 was subtly and attractively illuminated in a
25 way that would not be a problem for the

1 neighborhood.

2 COUNCILOR BLANKS: Thank you
3 for the clarification.

4 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you
5 Ms. Blanks. Anything further? Mr. Cortes?

6 COUNCILOR CORTES: First of
7 all, I want to say how bummed I am that I'm
8 going to have to continue to drive 10, 15
9 minutes to Maggie McFly's -- but I'm excited
10 that you guys took the time to bring this
11 business to our community.

12 I think that's what makes West
13 Farms Mall special. It's the mix of
14 different retails that we have, and I think
15 that's why we don't -- we're not sharing the
16 trend that you see in other malls in the
17 area.

18 You know, we do have high-end
19 stores, but then you do also have stores that
20 are family friendly. And you know, it covers
21 everyone and looking at the images it's, you
22 know, you're updating, you're modernizing
23 that side of the mall, you know, and it's
24 great to see that growth.

25 So my one question is, what's

1 that timeline for this to be completed, the
2 project to be completed?

3 MS. PEARSON: Would you?

4 NICOLE EDMISTON: Hi. Nikki
5 Edmiston with Arhaus. So we anticipate, as
6 long as everything goes well today, to start
7 construction the end of June, beginning of
8 July, and then with an opening of May 2023.

9 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you.

10 All set, Mr. Cortes?

11 COUNCILOR CORTES: Yes.

12 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Okay.

13 Mr. Davidoff?

14 COUNCILOR DAVIDOFF: Thank
15 you, Madam Mayor. Either to the Town Planner
16 or Corporation Counsel. In Section 177-44c1
17 there's a requirement that the owner execute
18 a letter of co-application with zoning
19 applications. And in the narrative presented
20 by Attorney Pearson she is asking for us to
21 waive it.

22 My question is, can we get a
23 reason as to why we ask the owner to serve as
24 a co-applicant? I'd like to first understand
25 the rationale on the Town part, and then I'll

1 ask a question to Attorney Pearson.

2 MR. DUMAIS: Todd Dumais, Town
3 Planner. Through you, Madam Mayor to
4 Councilor Davidoff.

5 It's my understanding that
6 provision exists because we have a limited
7 number of SDDs that are larger by geographic
8 extent and they overlap the property
9 boundary. So there's nothing that prohibits
10 an SDD from overlapping multiple properties.
11 And in a couple of instances West Farms Mall,
12 Corbins Corner, Bishops corner -- there are a
13 number of SDDs where you have multiple
14 property owners that comprise of an SDD.

15 So that provision was
16 installed in the last 30 years perhaps to
17 allow for flexibility for one of the owners
18 to advance an SDD amendment, since we already
19 have a notice provision built into the SDD
20 itself. So the other owners will
21 automatically get notice. If one of them
22 doesn't want to endorse the application or be
23 co-applicant, it would allow the application
24 to still move forward.

25 COUNCILOR DAVIDOFF: Thank

1 you. Through you, Madam Mayor.

2 Mr. Dumais, so with this
3 particular application has that standard been
4 met? Or do we need, as the Zoning Authority
5 needs to waive that requirement, because
6 there's no letter of co-application?

7 MR. DUMAIS: It's built into
8 the application. So as part of your approval
9 it's customary that you're approving the
10 waiver included in the application request.

11 COUNCILOR DAVIDOFF: Thank
12 you.

13 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you,
14 Mr. Davidoff. Anything further?

15 Okay. We have nothing from
16 the public. Reading into the record -- I
17 know that Attorney Pearson has done this, but
18 I just want to make sure -- a letter dated
19 May 5, 2022, from Town Planning and Zoning
20 Commission recommending approval; a letter
21 dated April 29, 2022, from Design Review
22 Advisory Committee recommending approval; a
23 letter dated April 29, 2022, from Capitol
24 Region Council of Governments finding no
25 apparent conflict in regional plans and

1 policies, or the concerns of neighboring
2 towns.

3 Is there anything further from
4 councilors on the phone or in person?

5 COUNCILOR BILLINGS-SMITH:

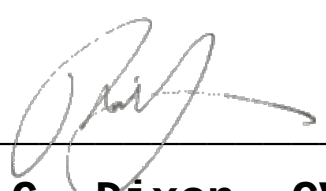
6 (Via telephone) No.

7 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Okay. All
8 right. Then we will close the public
9 hearing.

10
11 (End: 7:27 p.m.)
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the foregoing 28 pages are a complete and accurate computer-aided transcription of my original verbatim notes taken of the Public Hearing in RE: APPLICATION ON BEHALF OF ARHAUS, INC, LESSEE OF A PORTION OF 1500/1502 NEW BRITAIN AVENUE, MORE COMMONLY KNOWN AS WESTFARMS MALL, held before the West Hartford Town Council, at Town Hall, 50 South Main Street, Room 314, West Hartford, Connecticut, on May 24, 2022.



Robert G. Dixon, CVR-M 857

My Commission Expires:

6/30/2025