



Issued May 9, 2024

DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
*****SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES*****
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2024
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT

Call to Order/Roll Call: 4:30 P.M.

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair, Ray Giolitto; Members: Jenna McClure & Hugh Schweitzer Alternates: Jim Lawler

ABSENT: Brian Flemming, David Hines, Elizabeth Pang

Staff: Todd Dumais, Town Planner & Brian Pudlik, Senior Planner

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL:

1. **1700 Asylum Avenue** - Application of WeHa Development Group East, LLC owner of 1700 Asylum Avenue, for Change of Zone of approximately 14.9 acres of the northern portion of 1700 Asylum Avenue from a R-10 single-family zone to a RM-MS multifamily-multistory residence district zone with Special Development District Designation (SDD) overlay for the redevelopment of the northern portion of the site into a new multifamily housing development with associated parking and site amenities. The SDD overlay is also proposed to encompass the southern 8.9 acres of 1700 Asylum Avenue and includes new ballfield parking. No change of underlying zone is proposed for the southern portion of the property.

T. Dumais – Town Planner - Provided a brief introduction of the project and reminded the Committee that this formal referral from the Town Council represents the culmination of a process that included many prior informal study sessions. Also reminded the Committee that their role during this meeting is to make a formal recommendation to the Town Council.

M. Bruton – Project Engineer – Provided the following project details: The landscaping aesthetic, especially in the recreation lawn area adjacent to Trout Brook Drive will generally match the proposed aesthetic of 1800 Asylum, when submitted, which will tie the two sites together. The ball fields will remain and 100 new parking spaces will be provided for the exclusive use by users of the ballfields. Throughout the site, impervious area has been reduced from prior plan iterations by reducing parking space depths, reducing drive aisle widths and through the use of permeable pavers in some parking spots. Regarding public sidewalks, one has been added along the Trout Brook frontage to improve connectivity, but the Lawler Road sidewalk was eliminated, as it did not offer any public benefit. In removing that sidewalk, seven mature could be saved.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Asked how garbage and recycling would be handled. Mr. Bruton stated that all waste would be handled internally to each building with chutes from each floor directing waste into compactors. Staff would then move bagged and compacted waste out of the building for pick-up by a commercial waste hauler two times per week. Mr. Schweitzer asked whether any signage

is proposed for the development. Mr. Bruton stated that monument signs are proposed at the site entry. Mr. Schweitzer asked whether the Fire Marshal's office has reviewed the plans. Mr. Dumais indicated that fire apparatus turning template plans are being reviewed by that office. Mr. Schweitzer asked whether the gated vehicle entry is still part of the proposal. Mr. Bruton stated that it is.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Urged the development team to reconsider the gated entry. Mr. Bruton stated that the rationale for the gate is the owner's concern of ballfield users spilling into the residential parking lot when the ballfield parking lot is full. Mr. Giolitto asked whether talks with USJ on shared use of their parking had progressed any further. Mr. Fischer (Project Architect), stated that the team continues to work with USJ, but no agreements had been finalized.

J. McClure – DRAC member – Questioned whether the team was concerned at all about Building "B" occupants using the ballfield parking. Michael from Minno Wasko Architects stated that all units would have dedicated parking, so no need to use ballfield parking.

Michael – Minno & Wasko Architects – Made the following comments regarding the architecture: Noted that the community commons area integrated into building "D" has been better developed in the latest plans and depicted in the latest renderings. The building "D" roof deck design has also been more clearly articulated. Noted that buildings "A" & "B" will also have rooftop amenity spaces for the residents, which are provided on the west sides of the buildings where the fifth story step-back occurs. Building "C" does not have its own amenity space, but the ground level amenity space in building "D" will be open to all residents of the property regardless of which building they reside. Regarding rooftop mechanical equipment, he noted that they would be screened and positioned such that they will not be visible from the ground. Regarding building materials, red brick would be used, in addition to fiber cement panels in four shades of grey and corrugated metal panels as accents.

J. McClure – DRAC member – Questioned whether a shadow study has been done to evaluate shadows. The team responded that no shadow study was done and they recognize that there will be times where the common areas, particularly the pool, will be in shadow at times. Ms. McClure questioned how move-in's would be accommodated and organized. The team stated that move-in's would only be permitted during certain days and times and would heavily managed by ownership. Next, Ms. McClure asked whether there would be a railing at the fourth-floor open space on buildings "A" and "B". The team indicated there would be, but it would be below a parapet wall and not visible from the street. Ms. McClure asked about the proposed trellis in the same area and how the private terraces would be separated from the common open space. The team indicated that the trellis was a desirable element to shade some of the open space area and that the private terraces would be separated from the common space by planters. Lastly, Ms. McClure asked about materials planned for the garages. The team stated that similar materials to the main buildings would be used.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Questioned what type of landscaping is proposed behind the garages on the north side of the property and whether there would be maintenance agreements in place for all landscaping on site. Mr. Bruton indicated that the landscaping on the north side of the garages was

not determined at that time, but would likely be evergreen of some type. He further noted that maintenance agreements would be in place for care of all landscaping including wetland mitigation plantings. Mr. Giolitto then asked how the corrugated metal panels would come together at the corners. The team indicated that trim would be added to blend it together in a visually seamless way. Mr. Giolitto stated that metal corrugated evoked an industrial look, which is undesirable in this context. The team stated that they could explore the use of fiber cement panels instead, which the DRAC collectively agreed would be a better option.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Asked whether all condenser units would be screened. The team responded that they would. Mr. Schweitzer then asked the height of the proposed parapet walls. The team indicated they would be 42” all around. Mr. Schweitzer asked how roof access would be handled on all buildings. The team noted that building “D” would have stair access to the roof due to amenity space, but other buildings would have a roof hatch within the stairwells. Mr. Schweitzer asked what materials would be used within touch zones just above grade around the buildings. The team indicated that brick or other masonry would be used in all touch zones for durability. Mr. Schweitzer made the following suggestions regarding the garage buildings: the team should provide cross-sections at Lawler Road to help demonstrate their scale and position relative to the Lawler Road neighborhood; the team should review design options to break up the rear of the building. Finally, Mr. Schweitzer suggested that the slats on pergola located within the building “D” amenity space be turned 90 degrees to maximize their ability to provide shade.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – Stated that in his view, the project is inconsistent with the DRAC’s performance criteria, that it is not contextually appropriate for the neighborhood and that the size and scale of the buildings or incompatible.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Made a motion to recommend the Town Council approve the application. In doing so, made the following comments:

1. The relationship of the proposed buildings to the site and adjoining neighborhood is appropriate. While the collective buildings are substantial, their design, in particular site placement and architecture are compatible with its surroundings as supported by the following:
 - a. The building’s location on the property are centralized to the site and placed at points most distance from existing adjacent properties to the north and south which maximizes setbacks;
 - b. The building step backs (fourth to fifth story), along Trout Brook Drive help reduce their perceived massing from the public view shed;

All of which help to create a contextually sensitive response for the redevelopment of this portion of the former UConn Campus.

2. The proposed landscaping is of high quality and quantity. A good mixture of plantings ranging from street, flowering and evergreen trees to shrubs, perennials and grasses has

been effectively utilized to create a well-designed streetscape and appropriately planted and screened parking areas. Of particular note is the effort to preserve the Champion White Oak and create a naturalized planting environment.

3. The arrangement of landscaping, site amenities, and interior trash management system, are conducive to the overall long-term maintenance of the property.

As the proposed access-controlled vehicle gates contribute visually and functionally to a sense of separateness and withdrawal from the surrounding community, and maintenance of the gates may create issues for residents, guests, and deliveries, the Committee strongly encourages the Applicant to consider removing the access control gates from the plan.

H. Schweizer – DRAC member – Seconded the motion

VOTE: 3-1

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

2. February 15, 2024 – *Motion; Lawler /Second; McClure: Vote 4-0*

COMMUNICATION

3. None

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

4. None

ADJOURNMENT: 5:37 PM

Cc: Rick Ledwith, Town Manager
Dallas Dodge, Corporation Counsel

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk