



Issued July 3, 2024

DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
*****SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES*****
THURSDAY, June 27, 2024
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair, Ray Giolitto; Committee Members: Hugh Schweitzer, Brian Flemming & Jenna McClure Alternate: Jim Lawler

ABSENT: Liz Pang & David Hines

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

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN PLANNER:

1. **1800 Asylum Avenue** – Study session preparatory to the submission of a potential new Special Development District application for the redevelopment of the western portion of the former UConn campus located at 1800 Asylum Avenue. The applicant contemplates the redevelopment to include the demolition of all existing buildings and the construction of twelve (12) new buildings, including commercial / mixed-use and residential, a new private roadway and surface parking lots along with associated site improvements, including landscaping pedestrian pathways and site drainage. (*Most recent prior study session on 5-9-24*)

B. Pudlik – Senior Planner - Provided a very brief statement on the item before the Committee and noted that the goal of the meeting is for the design team to present that changes that have been made to the plan in response to the DRAC's comments since the last study session.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Stated that the signage and storefront guidelines that were provided to the Committee are not intended for discussion today, but simply to demonstrate that work had started on the document. She noted that additional work must be done in coordination with staff to determine how the existing zoning regulations for signage will be addressed in the document and once complete, the team will bring it to DRAC for comment.

M. Bruton – Project Engineer – In response to DRAC's comments on the placement and orientation of the grocery building, Mr. Bruton presented alternative orientations of the building. Upon reviewing those options and some discussion, the DRAC determined that the design team's preferred option is likely the least disruptive to both the project site and the existing neighborhood on Lawler Road.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – After a discussion around the most likely users of the parking lot west of the grocery store, Mr. Lawler inquired as to whether the connector drive from the northerly parking lot was necessary. Mr. Bruton indicated that it was necessary for fire access around the site.

M. Bruton – Project Engineer – Presented an alternative design to the southwest parking area as requested by Committee member Hines, which was to straighten the parking field and eliminate the

westernmost lobe of parking in order to increase the buffer to the wetland. Mr. Bruton noted that the change results in a loss of 13 parking spaces, which the team believes is problematic to the success of the project. He also noted that this orientation of the parking area does not provide for as many planted islands, resulting in fewer trees and shade to the parking lot. Finally, regarding the proximity to the wetland, noted that the limits of work for this proposal or the preferred option are the same given the need to remove existing built elements that remain from the former UConn campus.

R. Pearson – Project Attorney – Added that between the southwest parking area and Asylum Avenue, a large number of plantings will be provided, both trees and understory plantings, which will buffer the parking area from the residential neighbors on the south side of Asylum Avenue.

J. McClure – DRAC member – asked whether the triangularly shaped unpaved area on the east side of the southwest parking area will be landscaped with more than just grass. Mr. Bruton indicated that it would be planted with trees and other ornamental plants in addition to grass.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Presented the changes that have been made to buildings 7a and 7b that have been made in response to DRAC’s comments at the prior study session. Specifically, the easternmost unit on 7b has been removed, which shrinks the building by 20 feet and allows buildings 7 C/D and 7 E/F to be shift west and further from the wetlands. This change also facilitated additional changes to 7b which results in a gentler grade change, thus blending more gracefully to existing conditions. This change was universally appreciated by the DRAC as a very positive change.

Ms. Gilmore noted that the taller gable-end portions of buildings 7a and 7b have been reduced by one foot. The DRAC still felt as though there was too much vertical siding in that area and asked the team to further explore ways to handle that portion of the building.

Ms. Gilmore also presented options for various treatments to the front of buildings 7a and 7b, including one with windowed gables that project above the main roofline, an option with smaller gables without windows that read as a Tudor-style treatment and one with no gables and a straight roofline across the front. The DRAC indicated a preference for the Tudor-style dormers to the other alternatives.

B. Pudlik – Senior Planner – Asked what was happening with the flat awnings that are shown over the doorways of the townhomes. Ms. Gilmore stated that they plan to have some type of cover over the door, but what is shown is not a finished design and needs more work. Ms. McClure, DRAC member, suggested they look to the homes across the street for inspiration on how to handle the awnings.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Presented the landscaping changes that have been made at the rear of buildings 8 A/D and 8 C/D on Lawler Road, which include dense line of plantings to screen both the grocery store and the parking area immediately south of the townhomes. Ms. Gilmore also stated that street trees are proposed in front of the Lawler townhomes.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – Asked whether overhead power lines are present on the project side of the road or on the opposite site. Mr. Bruton indicated that the power lines are on their property and that the placement and species of proposed tree would need to be carefully considered to not conflict with the power lines.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Presented the proposed changes to the north elevation of the grocery store in response to DRAC’s comments at the prior study session. Those changes included murals, material changes and other architectural features to help break up the long façade.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Asked how much of a truck parked in the loading dock will be visible given proposed screening and the change of grade into the loading area. Ms. Gilmore noted that they can provide a visualization of that for the next study session.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Asked how the mural will be achieved (painted brick, applied graphic, painted metal panel?). Ms. Gilmore stated that they have not determined that level of detail at this time.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Presented the proposed changes to buildings 2 & 5 in response to DRAC’s comments from the prior study session. Those changes include changes to architectural elements to simplify the corner elements of the buildings in addition to the “bridge” section that connects the northern and southerly portions of building 2. She noted that similar changes were made to building 5 in order to maintain continuity between the two similar buildings.

Ms. Gilmore then presented refinements and changes that have been made to buildings 3 and 4 (restaurant and spa, respectively). Notably, the west and south facades of building 4 have been modified so that the wood-look paneling on the west side now wraps around to a portion of the south side and the remainder of that side has been dramatically simplified from the prior design. Depictions of rooftop amenities for both buildings were also presented.

J. McClure – DRAC member – Stated that she still feels like more needs to be done to tie buildings 3 and 4 to the others on the site – at this stage, they feel disjointed. She specifically noted that the buildings do not have to look the same, but a discernable relationship should be established in the design vernacular.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Echoed Ms. McClure’s points and stated buildings 3 and 4 are so different that they evoke a sense of exclusivity that breaks down the sense of a neighborhood or village that the developer indicated is a priority.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Asked that the team add a visualization image looking east from between buildings 2 and 5.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Asked that the team adds some dusk visualizations. Regarding buildings 3 and 4, stressed that the team should review future reuse of these buildings should the current planned tenants leave. Ms. Gilmore stated that they are keeping that in mind in their design of the buildings.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Presented some of the changes to the assisted living facility, but noted that they are still not satisfied with it and that more needed to be done to tie it into the rest of the development.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – Asked whether the RTU's on the roof of building 5 would be visible from the upper story units of the assisted living building. Ms. Gilmore stated that those would be screened, so they will not be visible.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Stated that the tall gable ends on buildings 7a and 7b still felt too heaving despite efforts to reduce their mass. Suggested the team review alternative ways to break up those facades. Mr. Schweitzer also stated that he preferred the white Tudor-style elements that were added to break up the front of buildings 7a and 7b. The DRAC collectively agreed with that approach.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

2.

a. May 23, 2024 – ***Motion: Schweitzer; Second: Lawler – Approved***

COMMUNICATION

3. None

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

4. None

ADJOURNMENT: 6:00 PM

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk