



Issued August 8, 2025

DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
*****SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES*****
THURSDAY, JULY 17, 2025
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Committee Members; Jenna McClure, Liz Pang, Brian Flemming, David Hines, and Angela Cahill. Alternates: Rick Conary and Jim Lawler

ABSENT: Ray Giolitto

Staff: Todd Dumais, Town Planner, and Robert Gosselin, Associate Planner

FORMAL REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN PLANNER:

1. **978 Farmington Avenue** – Application (SP #1479) of MHG West Hartford LLC, requesting approval of a Site Plan application for the redevelopment the existing building(s) at 978 Farmington Avenue into a new mixed-use building with ground floor commercial restaurant space and a new second floor containing 5 residential apartment units.

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Introduced the project to the Committee, noting the proposed change of use is an as-of-right site plan application being referred under the Town Planner’s authority to DRAC for such applications.

M. Blair – Project Architect – Introduced the project team, including the owners of Mercato Marketplace and Blu Pointe: Eli Hawli and Sam Devellis. Mr. Blair presented an overall vision for the project as a revitalizing the former CVS building with new restaurant concepts and a new residential second floor. He next went into a more detailed explanation of site changes, including the following:

- ***Preliminary plans for an outdoor dining area.***
- ***Creation of a new second floor of 5 units of residential housing utilizing a steel platform over the existing roof that will sit 2 to 3 feet above the existing building.***
- ***Proposed balconies designed to meet the open space requirements for each residential unit which project 4 feet on the Farmington Avenue façade and will have glass and steel structure to appear less heavy on the façade.***
- ***Building façade including white brick on the back of the building, facing the public parking, to include a painted mural façade. To make this rear still feel like a front entrance, the plan includes added plantings, the mural, a large lighting feature, and more subtle architectural features.***
- ***The new residential entry is proposed in approximately the same location as the existing CVS rear entry.***
- ***Parking is proposed as tandem parking spaces for the residential units under the new second floor residential at the rear, where the existing trash area is located today.***

- *The pedestrian passage way from the rear parking area to Farmington Avenue will be enhanced with new windows at the ground level looking into restaurant.*
- *Explained how architectural features informed the new design and façade details.*
- *The intention to bring architectural elements from the restaurant, such as marble texture flooring or other value adds into the interior of the apartments.*
- *Proposed color choices for fixtures, the façade, and awnings as demonstrated in the plans.*
- *Exterior landscaping features such as rustic wood planters, corten steel planters, climbing vines, and plantings.*

D. Hines – DRAC member – Stated that he is happy to see the project as a whole, particularly because this location has been vacant for some time. Mr. Hines expressed a concern that the front balconies project too far from the façade and that recessed balconies would be his preferred approach. Mr. Hines also noted that, as a non-architect, he finds the two different styles between the first and second floor to lack cohesiveness.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – Stated that this is a nice change for the building and that he likes the separation of the contemporary style above the building. Mr. Lawler asked a question about trash management.

R. Conary – DRAC member – Stated that he likes the new building, especially the improvements to the rear of the building. He noted that he was indifferent on the styles change between the first and second floor. Mr. Conary expressed a concern on the balconies, especially with the glass providing high visibility as some of the front balconies serve bedrooms. He noted that he strongly supported the new windows along the public way which should provide excitement into that tight space. Mr. Conary asked how the dumpsters would be handled behind the building; where are the four accessible spaces, currently there, being moved to; and how are deliveries going to be handled? He noted that the metal planter might not work well in the space they are specified for and suggested that the vines in the elevations going over the parking area are too far from planting beds to thrive. Mr. Conary asked if any thought was given to a canopy to completely cover the cars parked in the outer tandem spaces? Overall, he stated that this was a great project and that he really likes the mural.

J. McClure – Acting Chair and DRAC member – Asked staff to discuss the trash and loading before moving forward.

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Using ariel imagery, oriented the Committee to the site and discussed how the current trash enclosure serves multiple properties without any formal agreements. He noted that the Town is working with the development team to create a modern, comparably sized enclosure in an area adjacent to the detached garage building that exists on the Applicant's property within the Town-operated parking area. Mr. Dumais also explained that one of the ADA spaces will be retained and that the other three spaces being displaced by the development are planned to be relocated near the public pathway that leads to Farmington Avenue, on the Town's adjacent property.

Ms. Cahill – DRAC Member – asked if the trash from the new restaurants will go to the new enclosure and if the residential trash would be carried out down the stairs or if there are trash chutes? Mr. Blair responded yes and that resident will carry trash to that enclosure as well.

J. McClure- Acting Chair and DRAC member – Asked that the applicant to provide additional details on deliveries and loading. Mr. Blair stated that current loading takes place along the rear of the building, in the general area of the existing drive aisle and that the required half-loading space could operate in a similar fashion. Ms. McClure asked where the loading for the restaurant would enter the building. Mr. Blair showed the floor plan and explained which door and set of stairs would serve that purpose. Mr. Lawler noted that this is similar to how other establishment on Farmington Avenue operate.

Mr. Dumais noted that the applicant provided an alternate balcony configuration which depicts a single balcony in the middle of the front façade. He states that this configuration is also an option because the other two Farmington Avenue facing balconies are not needed to meet the open space requirements.

Mr. Blair then clarified that there has also been a change to the Farmington Avenue facing balconies which have been adjusted to project only four feet from the building face. To address an earlier comment, he noted that he doesn't have a strong commitment to glass vs wrought iron railings and that the design team struggled with a balcony concept that would be compatible with existing conditions on Farmington Avenue in order to provide outdoor space to the proposed living units and considered both wrought iron and glass for the railing. Regarding the size of the planter, stated they could review options for a smaller planter.

A. Cahill – DRAC member – complimented the design team for optimizing use of the property while maintaining the existing building. She also noted her concerns about the use of glass on the front of the building in the balconies and the large windows. She suggested some type of required privacy screening curtains within the building to manage this. Ms. Cahill then expressed a concern about the proposed resident parking being close to the public parking and potential for members of the public to accidentally use it. She suggested that a lower canopy structure may help to discourage non-residents from parking there. She also commented that she believed that the shared stairwell between the restaurants and residents will need to be clearly defined and managed.

Ms. Cahill then asked if the front plantings and outdoor dining have been coordinated with the new streetscape design by the Town. Mr. Dumais confirmed that the town shared the design of the new sidewalks and planting areas but that the types of plantings haven't been fully selected. Ms. Cahill asks if the outdoor dining area has been coordinated with this plan. Mr. Blair explains that they have taken this plan into account and that they hope to be able to encroach into the ROW. Mr. Dumais clarified that the eight feet on the property will be for the outdoor dining area to use but that the amount of area into the ROW is still to be determined but based on the current plan it appeared that it could be expanded an additional 10-12 feet.

Ms. Cahill next asked where the proposed HVAC and venting equipment will go and if they have detailed where the existing adjacent restaurants venting is located. Mr. Blair states that they haven't

studied where Treva's venting is but they will. He noted that the HVAC and venting for the new restaurants is going to be through the center of the building to the roof and shouldn't be visible from sensitive pedestrian viewsheds. He further stated that all rooftop equipment is planned to be at least ten feet away from the roof edge and parapet and that the second floor also has a 10-foot separation from the property line, which should meet code requirements regardless of Treva's venting. Also, El Santo's venting should be higher than this building and is further away.

L. Pang – DRAC member, commented that she likes the building and its design. She also stated her preference for a single center balcony option on Farmington Avenue. Ms. Pang suggested a slimmer tree, such as a columnar sweet gum, be planted in the back planting area to add additional screening to the climbing vine.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – commented that the project looks great, specifically the roof trim, windows, color contrast, and the Mural. He suggested that, if possible, the mural be wrapped around the back of the building into the alley area, and instead of paint be done in tile. He noted he doesn't have issue with the glass hand rails, but suggests a product similar to switch glass for the windows to add privacy. Mr. Flemming said he doesn't believe the added canopy to cover the cars is necessary but instead, as a way to discourage parking in the resident area, a material change, such as concrete for the parking area surface treatment be explored.

Ms. McClure commented that the overall project is exciting and that the scale of the project is very appropriate. She supported the use of multiple balconies along Farmington Avenue and encouraged the design team to model the roof top units to scale to be sure they won't be visible.

Mr. Lawler suggested making the elevator two-sided to separate the residential lobby. Mr. Blair states that they could consider this.

Mr. Flemming made a motion to recommend approval of the application finding it consistent with the Committee's Performance Criteria. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pang and approved by a vote of 6-0.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

2. Minutes from the May 29, 2025 Meeting – Motion: J. Lawler; Second: J. McCue – Approved, 4-0
(Flemming, Hine and Cahill recused)

ADJOURNMENT: 5:37 PM – Motion: B. Flemming; Second: D. Hines, Vote: 6- 0

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk