



Issued September 5, 2025

DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
*****SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES*****
THURSDAY, AUGUST 7, 2025
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair: Ray Giolitto; Committee Members; Angela Cahill, David Hines, Liz Pang.
Alternate: Jim Lawler

ABSENT: Rick Conary, Brian Flemming and Jenna McClure

Staff: Todd Dumais, Town Planner, Brian Pudlik, Senior Planner and Robert Gosselin, Associate Planner

FORMAL REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN PLANNER:

1. **1678 Asylum Avenue:** Study session preparatory to the submission of Special Use Permit application for the construction of a new welcome center and library renovation / . expansion project at the University of Saint Joseph.

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Introduced the project to the Committee and explained that this project is expected to come in as a Special Use Permit, during which a formal referral to DRAC from the TPZ would occur.

B. Swain – Project Architect – Provided a general project overview by noting the following:

- ***The existing condition of the project area generally functions and is designed as a back-of-house area with a loading dock and exposed building utility equipment. It is not an attractive space, but is one of the first things visitors and students see as they enter the campus.***
- ***The proposed building addition and screening elements will help to reimagine this area as a “gateway” to the University.***
- ***The project aims to reimagine the existing library space by converting it to a visitor center and admissions office and to create a focal point as you enter the campus from Asylum Avenue.***
- ***The scope of the project includes an 1100 square foot addition, cladding of the existing brick structure to match cladding on the proposed addition, construction of a screen wall to hide existing mechanical equipment, extensive interior remodeling to create the admissions office and visitor center, an outdoor patio and landscaping.***

T. Barker – Project Architect – Reiterated the primary project goals, then made the following comments on the design philosophy that drove the aesthetic of the addition and remodeled section of the building:

- ***The proposed glass-walled addition, curved elements that have been introduced in the roofline and laminate cladding material are meant to evoke existing architectural features on campus such as arched windows and use of limestone as an accent to the brick elements.***

- *The use of large glass curtain walls will create an outward focus once inside the space, but the glazing used will be treated to prevent glare and reduce bird strikes.*
- *By cladding areas beyond just the 1100 square foot addition, the project will make a larger statement and become more of a focal point.*
- *The use of vertical cladding gives the project a distinctly different feel from the existing buildings on campus.*

Regarding signage, Mr. Swain stated that a large wall mounted or similar sign is proposed on the new equipment screening wall to the left of the glass building addition entry, in addition to low-lying monument sign closer to the parking lot.

J. Schuler – Project Engineer – Provided the following project objectives for landscaping and site design:

- *To create a welcoming and inclusive environment*
- *To Ensure universal accessibility*
- *To introduce functional outdoor programming*
- *To use native and site-appropriate plantings, which align with the existing campus typology*

Regarding the ramp, which connects the parking lot to the new building entry, Ms. Schuler noted that the intent is to make the ramp an interesting feature with integrated landscaping around the ramp as it descends from the upper plane to the lower plan of the parking area.

Finally, Ms. Schuler noted that adjacent to the proposed addition and at the top of the ramp are two terraced patio areas; the upper patio with traditional stone pavers and the lower patio with grass pavers. Landscaping is being added around the full extent of the new patio areas.

D. Hines – DRAC member – Questioned whether the sidewalk is flush. Ms. Schuler confirmed that it is. Mr. Hines went on to say that the architecture is a nice blend between more classic and modern styles. Finally, he stated that they should review the approach into the site to ensure that the trees at the new parking lot entry do not block view of the proposed project.

L. Pang – DRAC member – Stated that the team should prepare a rendering which shows the experience of someone approaching the campus and project area from the easterly driveway, which might help to ensure that the project is achieving the objectives of the team. Ms. Pang stated that she would prefer to see a design option with more brick and fewer mullions on the windows. Lastly, she made some suggestions on specific plant species that may be more appropriate than those currently proposed.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – Noted that he recognizes the need for this new facility, but as currently proposed, the project is not respectful of the existing architecture on campus.

A. Cahill – DRAC member – Began by stating that this is an exciting project for the University. Ms. Cahill followed that up with the following comments and inquiries:

- *Given that the university has two entrances off of Asylum Avenue, the school must commit to the easterly entrance given the location of the proposed project.*
- *Encouraged the team to review the experience of someone entering the property from the easterly driveway to ensure that the proposed project has the intended effect of being a welcoming beacon.*
- *Suggested that the team explore improvements to the walking path network around this building to ensure safe and effective connectivity to the remainder of campus.*
- *Questioned where the books are going given the conversion of the library. Rhona Free – USJ President – stated that the books are being evaluated to determine those that are worth keeping. Those are determined not worth keeping will be donated.*
- *Regarding the overall architectural design language on the proposed project, Ms. Cahill stated that it reads as ecclesiastical, which is a stark contrast to the other buildings on the campus. Ms. Cahill went on to question whether the intent is to introduce this design language across the campus. Mr. Barker stated that it is not the intent.*
- *Given that response, Ms. Cahill stated that this project is too far a departure from the existing architecture on campus and therefore is not harmonious.*
- *Regarding specific detailing, Ms. Cahill suggested the team look at lighter color mullions and warmer tones for the cladding material.*

R. Giolitto – DRAC Chair – Generally did not believe that this project successfully achieved the stated goal of being a modern representation of the existing architecture on the campus. He stated that the Gengras Center is an example of a recently constructed building on campus that is more successful in achieving that goal. Regarding the use of curved and vertical elements, Mr. Giolitto stated that there is no context for these type of elements on campus and was confused as to why they were highlighted as such in both the design language and in the presentation.

2. **SDD #160 – 1360 Trout Brook Drive** - Notice of Town Planner's intention to approve, pursuant to section 177-44C (9)(b)(d)(e) a request filed on behalf of West Hartford Developers, LLC, owners, for revisions to the approved Special Development District plan (SDD #160) located at 1360 Trout Brook Drive. The request is for proposed architectural, landscape, and accessory structures changes all to accommodate overall design enhancements related to project constructability.

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Introduced the project and provided the Committee with background information on the SDD process and criteria for amending a prior SDD approval through an administrative process.

M. Lawson – Project Architect – Walked the Committee through the proposed changes both to the buildings and the site. He noted that the majority of the changes were driven by constructability considerations that had to be made in transitioning from purely design drawings to construction drawings. He stated that the team did introduce a new building as part of the Building D amenity area to accommodate bathrooms for the pool area and to house the pool equipment. Regarding the site changes, he noted that most of those were driven by Eversource transformer location requirements. He also noted that a small dog park was introduced at the northwest corner of the property.

A. Cahill – DRAC member – Questioned whether people would be entering the pool area via the parking lot to the east. Mr. Lawson indicated that may be the case and there is a gate in the fence to allow access from the parking lot. Ms. Cahill also suggested the team look at a more irregularly shaped space for the dog park, which may be more effective as a dog recreation area.

R. Giolitto – DRAC Chair – Stated that he appreciates the change to the corner element on Building D and generally has no concerns with the overall changes.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – Made a motion to approve the application stating that the proposed changes are consistent with spirit and design intent of the originally approved plans.

L. Pang – DRAC member – Seconded Mr. Lawler’s motion.

Vote: 4-0 (Hines recused)

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

3. Minutes from the July 17, 2025 meeting – **Motion: L. Pang; Second: J. Lawler – Approved, 3-0**
(Giolitto, Hines and Cahill recused)

ADJOURNMENT: 5:45 PM – Motion: Giolitto; Second: Lawler, Vote: 5- 0

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk