

Issued September 2, 2022

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
***DRAFT SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES ***
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2022
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Jeffrey Gebrian, Ray Giolitto, Sheldon Crosby, Kimberly Parsons-Whitaker and Jim Lawler

Staff: Todd Dumais, Town Planner, Brian Pudlik, Associate Planner

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL:

1. **27-43 & 53-65 LaSalle Road, 8 & 12 Arapahoe Road and 1001 Farmington Avenue** – Formal referral associated with an application filed on behalf of The Arapahoe Group, LLC the intended partial owner, developer and operator of a proposed mixed-use residential and commercial infill development on 3.4 acres of land fronting on Arapahoe and LaSalle Roads and Farmington Avenue. The proposed development includes five properties and contemplates the demolition of two existing buildings on Arapahoe and the construction of two new buildings containing 85 multifamily housing units and 3,500 s.f. of new commercial space along with associated site amenities including a parking garage, surface parking, landscaping and public areas. (*Initial Study Session on 1-19-22, additional study sessions on 2-24-22, 3-24-22 and 5-5-22*)

Mr. Dumais introduced the application and provided a brief background on the project and prior study sessions, which led to the final design being presented as part of a formal Town Council referral.

Attorney Pearson, Counsel for the applicant, provided a more comprehensive background of the project as well as a brief overview of the project's attributes

Mr. Fitzgerald, project Engineer, reiterated that the project does two important things: infills an underutilized parking lot with a new building ("building A") with structured parking as well as infilling the parking lot at the northwest corner of LaSalle Road and Arapahoe Road with a second new building ("building B"). He noted that "building B" completes the block by eliminating a gap in the street wall. The placement of "building A" is such that the existing buildings on both Farmington Avenue and LaSalle Road will screen the majority of the building's mass, and from Arapahoe Road, the substantial setback together with proposed landscaping will reduce the visual impact. The public improvements associated with the project include substantial enhancements to the alleyway from LaSalle Road to the rear parking area and pedestrian entry into the parking garage, realigning the crosswalk on LaSalle to match the position of the alleyway and creating a large public open space on Arapahoe Road, at the southwest corner of the project site. Finally, he noted that LID

elements such as tree boxes and a hydrodynamic separator would be utilized to improve stormwater quality.

Mr. Pather, project Architect, expressed appreciation for the informal study sessions with the DRAC, which ultimately led to the project being presented. The process helped to refine the architecture of both buildings as well as the overall site plan, such that the project now effectively creates a sense of place in the neighborhood. With respect to the height and overall massing of “building A”, he and the team believe it is appropriate given the position of the building on the site. Mr. Prather provided some detailed information on how mechanical venting would take place, the location of gas meters and noted that roof-mounted, screened electric heat pumps would be used for HVAC to each unit.

Mr. Dumais, Town Planner, state the purpose of the DRAC as well as provided an overview of the performance criteria the DRAC are to use when evaluating whether or not to recommend approval of the project to the Town Council.

Mr. Giolitto, DRAC member, stated that he has concerns regarding the project as a whole, particularly the mass and scale of “building A”. He indicated that while he supports the building proposed at the corner of Arapahoe and LaSalle as well as the pocket park on Arapahoe, these benefits are overshadowed by the concerns related to “building A”. He stated that as presented, the project is not consistent with the DRAC’s performance criteria, that the project does not relate to adjoining properties and that the overall proportions of “building A” are not compatible with surroundings.

Mr. Crosby, DRAC member, state that “building A” does not fit the site; that the building is so close to adjacent buildings that it has no room to “breathe”. He disputed the statement that the project successfully creates a sense of place, indicating that the project does not represent a two-way street of public and private benefits. Mr. Crosby did mention that he appreciates how hard the design team worked on the proposal and respects the position they are in.

Ms. Parsons-Whitaker, DRAC member, stated that public benefits are critical to creating a sense of place and this project does not offer enough for that to be the case. Regarding “building A”, it is too big and the massing does not elevate the surrounding neighborhood.

Mr. Gebrian, DRAC member, appreciates the level of workmanship that has gone into the development of the project, but ultimately, “building A” is too big relative to its surroundings. The building needs more space around it, which should be accomplished by reducing the footprint of the building by 15-20 percent. Regarding the project as a whole, the landscaping is insufficient and the pocket park on Arapahoe will not be very functional due to its steep slopes.

Mr. Lawler, DRAC member, commented on stated improvements made to the alleyway off of LaSalle Road. He indicated that the alley creates no meaningful connection between the two areas and leaves pedestrians with little reason to utilize the space apart from walking to and from the proposed parking garage.

Mr. Giolitto made a motion to NOT Recommend Approval to the Town Council on the application. He stated his appreciation for the applicant's participation in the Design Review Advisory Committee's process but noted it did not result in a material change in the concept or scale since its first review meeting.

Mr. Giolitto continued by stating he supported certain elements of the application, in particular the placement of a new mixed-use building on the corner of LaSalle and Arapahoe which strengthens the street wall and the inclusion of new pocket parks. However, he added they are overshadowed, by the overall size, scale and placement of Building A, the larger condominium / parking garage building on the property.

Mr. Giolitto continued his motion by stating, the overall application as currently presented is inconsistent with the Committee's first three most critical and applicable performance criteria:

- 1. Relationship of the Building to the Site: The height and scale of Building A is not compatible with the site or adjoining buildings and does not accomplish an appropriate transition with the streetscape.***
- 2. Relationship of Building and Site or Adjoining Area: Building A's mass and placement does not create a visually pleasing or coherent site design.***
- 3. Building Deign: Building A's scale, architectural design and proportions are not compatible with the neighborhood.***

For the stated reasons, Mr. Giolitto noted he cannot offer a positive recommendation on this application. He did encourage to the applicant to consider an alternative design that addresses these concerns or consider an application that includes a corner only building development. Mrs. Parsons-Whitaker seconded the motion and the Committee acted by unanimous vote, to not recommended approval to the Town Council 5-0 of the application.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

- 2. August 18, 2022 Regular Meeting Minutes
The Committee approved the meeting minutes by unanimous vote, 3-0 (motion by Lawler; second by Parsons-Whitaker).***

ADJOURNMENT: 18:00

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Essie Labrot, Town Clerk