

Issued January 17, 2023

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
DRAFT REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 2023
ROOM 407, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

AGENDA

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair Jeffrey Gebrian; Members Ray Giolitto, Kimberly Parsons Whitaker, Brian Flemming, Hugh Schweitzer, Jenna McClure. Alternates: Jim Lawler

ABSENT: None

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

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL:

1. Application filed on behalf of Blue Back Capital Partners and Charter Realty Development Corp. owners and managing partners of Special Development District #113, also known as Blue Back Square. The application requests an amendment to the existing Special Development District Design Guidelines to create a new standard for "Freestanding Shade Structures"

Mr. Dumais introduced the application and provided some background on why BBS is requesting the change.

The DRAC had a brief discussion around whether the requested change would also permit enclosing the contemplated shade structures with sidewalls to lengthen their use during colder times of the year. Staff noted that as submitted, the proposed design guideline change does not reference sidewalls; therefore, they would not be permitted.

Ray Giolitto – made a motion to recommend approval to the Town Council; second by Ms. Parsons Whitaker. Vote 5-0, approved.

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN PLANNER:

2. **445 South Main Street** – Study session preparatory to the submission of a Special Development District amendment application. The application proposes the expansion of the existing medical office building and reconfiguration and expansion of existing parking areas along with landscaping, grading and drainage improvements to Special Development District #15, more commonly known as Corporate Center West. (Initial Study Session on 4-21-22, additional study session on 6-16-22)

Mr. Dumais introduced the project and noted that this the third study session for this project.

W. Violet – Project Landscape Architect – Began by provided the DRAC with a site orientation. He went on to describe the proposed site improvements, which include new landscaping throughout the project area in addition to a “pocket park” at the southeast corner of the project area and near the intersection of New Britain Avenue and South Main Street. Within the pocket park, the team is proposing seat walls and more formal seating and expects that the space will be used not only by users of this property, but potentially by customers of the neighboring Doro Marketplace and Dunkin’.

Regarding site grading, Mr. Violet noted that the existing topography slopes down from south to north. As a result, in order to establish a flat pad for the proposed addition to the existing building, a retaining wall with a maximum height of seven (7) feet (at northeast corner of project area) will be required. Given the high visibility of the wall at its maximum height, an emphasis will be placed on screening with plantings both in front of the wall and potentially cascading down from on top of the wall.

K. Parsons Whitaker – DRAC member – Suggested that more thought needed to be put into the pocket park to address traffic noise and lack of shade.

J. Gebrian – DRAC member – Suggested that the two parking spaces immediately west of the pocket park be eliminated because as currently shown, they encroach into the space. Regarding the retaining wall, he suggested that it be tapered to reduce its visual impact at the northeast corner.

Mr. Dumais – Town Planner – Suggested that the bike rack be relocated closer to the building and pocket park.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Expressed concern over two-way traffic crossing through the pocket park. The development team noted that bollards would be used to protect people.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Expressed concern regarding the height of the proposed retaining wall at the northeast corner of the project area. Noted that as depicted, no attention was paid to screening the wall. He suggested that adding additional plantings in this area would be extremely important in addition to looking at some type of signage on the face of the wall, if appropriate.

N. Michnevitz – Project Architect – Made a brief presentation on the proposed architecture and referred to the changes that have been made in response to DRAC comments during prior study sessions. He went on to explain some of the expected challenges they will have with construction phasing due to the client’s requirement to maintain operation of the office while the project is being completed. He then presented a video fly-through the project site.

J. McClure – DRAC member – Questioned how the pocket park would be lit. The Development team noted that lighting will be provided within the front canopy in addition to lit bollards and seat wall lighting.

3. **900 Farmington Avenue** – Formal referral from the Town Planner on Site Plan Application #1397. The site plan seeks approval for the redevelopment of the West Hartford Inn property into a new residential multifamily use and includes the demolition of the existing restaurant building and the construction of a new residential wing with community amenity space on the first floor and apartments above. *(Initial Study Session on 11-10-22, additional study session on 12-1-22 and 12-15-22)*

Mr. Dumais introduced the application and provided the DRAC with a summary of the changes made since the last study session.

Ray Giolitto – made a motion to recommend approval to the Town Planner; second by Ms. Parsons Whitaker. Vote 5-0, approved.

ANNUAL MEETING

4. Election of Officers

Jim Lawler – made a motion to appoint Ray Giolitto as DRAC Chair; second by Ms. Parsons Whitaker. Vote 5-0, approved.

Kimberly Parsons Whitaker – made a motion to appoint Hugh Schweitzer as DRAC Vice-Chair; second by B. Flemming. Vote 5-0, approved.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

1. None.

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

2. None.

ADJOURNMENT: 5:42 PM

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Essie Labrot, Town Clerk