

Issued January 17, 2023

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
DRAFT REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2023
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

AGENDA

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

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

ABSENT: None

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

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN PLANNER:

1. **1700 Asylum Avenue & 1800 Asylum Avenue** – Study session preparatory to the submission of a potential new Special Development District application for the redevelopment of the former UConn campus. The applicant contemplates the redevelopment of both the eastern and western portions of the campus with multifamily housing and mixed-use development including commercial, retail, restaurant, residential and office uses. (*Initial study session on 10-27-22, additional study sessions on 11-10-22 and 12-15-22*).

Mr. Dumais – Town Planner - introduced the application, provided background on the project and the previous three study sessions.

B. Fischer – Project Architect (west side) – Provided an overview of the site, the development history of the properties and the developer’s vision for the future.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect (west side) – Provided some background on the evolution of the project to date and the changes made in response to DRAC’s review in prior study sessions. Based on DRAC feedback, the design team explored relocating the medical tenant to the east side of the campus and incorporating it into the previously proposed residential development plan. In doing so, they found that both the residential and medical aspects of the project would be compromised due to site configuration and parking needs of the medical tenant.

Ms. Gilmore went on to note improvements that were made to the existing plan in response to the comments made by DRAC during the prior study session. Those included better buffering of the development along Lawler Road and additional screening of the grocery loading area. Lastly, she indicated that more information might be ready to share at the next study session regarding the proposed medical building.

Mr. Dumais – Town Planner – Expressed concern regarding the secondary drop off lane for the medical tenant as well as the expanded parking area to the east of the medical building location.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Expressed concern around potential lack of cohesion between the various aspects of the project that are being handled by different design teams.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect (west side) – Restated the emphasis being placed on the planted buffers from both Lawler Road and Asylum Avenue as well as the screening proposed for grocery loading area.

Regarding the proposed tenant mix, Ms. Gilmore noted roughly an even split with 24,000 square feet of both retail and restaurant uses.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Noted the possible benefit of having the “wellness district” concentrated on the south side of the development, which might provide a distinct separation of traffic visiting the “wellness district” from those visiting the “village district” to the north.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member questioned how trash management would be handled for the grocery. The development team indicated that all trash and recycling facilities would be integrated into the loading dock area.

B. Fischer – Project Architect (west side) – Regarding loading areas in general, indicated that some of the proposed restaurants would have direct loading areas and others would not. Prospective restaurant tenants without excessive waste would locate in the tenant spaces without direct loading areas.

J. Gebrian – DRAC member – Indicated that the design team should study the parking being proposed more carefully to determine if there is too much or too little. Regarding landscaping, he indicated that a much more robust planting plan should be presented that reflects a cohesive theme across the different aspects of the project.

J. Mancini – Project Engineer – In response to Mr. Gebrian’s landscaping comments, asked that the DRAC endorse the inclusion of public open space and walking paths within the project area.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Raised concern over traffic impacts on Asylum from the “Wellness District”. He also raised concern for the parking being provided to the Town baseball fields – stated that substantially more would be required to accommodate families when all fields are in use.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Regarding the parking garage, stated that he expects a “really special” treatment of its façade due to its prominent location within the site. Regarding the grocery, he expressed concern regarding the proximity of the loading area to Lawler Road, despite proposed screening.

B. Fischer – Project Architect (west side) – In response to Mr. Schweitzer’s concern regarding the grocery loading area, noted that relocating the grocery to the interior of the development would disrupt the village aesthetic and introduce parking and loading challenges.

Mr. Dumais – Town Planner – Indicated that a larger buffer would be required from wetland areas. Regarding the layout of the grocery parking lot, he questioned how vehicles would know how to navigate the wide open area designed to facilitate truck circulation into the loading area.

Rep. from Minno Wasko – Project Architect (east side) – Presented a conceptual view of the architecture for the residential buildings on the east side of the campus, a section view through Trout Brook Drive and introduced possible amenities for the residential tenants.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Raised concern for five-story buildings along Trout Brook Drive.

Minno Wasko – In response to Mr. Giolitto indicated that they could explore stepping back the fifth story.

Mr. Dumais – Town Planner – Expressed concern for the mass of buildings along Trout Brook Drive. Suggested that an overall reduction of units should be explored to allow for a reduction of mass throughout the project area.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Encouraged the developer to study a reduction of building heights along Trout Brook Drive.

K. Parsons Whitaker – DRAC member – raised concern over the card reader accessible parking for the east campus development. Stated that parking should be shared across the entire project area for both the east and west sides of the project area.

J. Gebrian – DRAC member – Raised concerns regarding the proximity of the parking areas to the Champion Oak. Suggested that a larger buffer be established around the tree, which could be used as a naturalist recreation area.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Re-emphasized the need for additional parking to serve the baseball fields. As shown, there is not enough.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Stated that the north wing of “Building C” needs to step down. Regarding overall site design, he indicated that there must be a focus from all of the design teams involved in the project to ensure that there is continuity of design. Noted that the project, when complete, should look like it came from the same design team.

Mr. Dumais – Town Planner – Requested that the team look at the placement of “Building E” relative to the wetland area to the east. He also raised some general concerns regarding traffic volumes and speeds along Trout Brook Drive. Suggested that an emphasis should be placed on slowing vehicle speeds down.

Mr. Pudlik – Associate Planner – Indicated that five-story buildings along Trout Brook Drive are inappropriate and they would create an imposing streetscape. Suggested that those buildings be reduced in height or should have the fifth floor stepped back. He provided support for the improved buffers along Lawler Road and better screened loading area for the grocery store. Finally, regarding

the parking garage, noted that a strong design emphasis was needed to help integrate the structure into the development.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

2.
 - a. July 28, 2022
 - b. October 13, 2022
 - c. October 27, 2022 – Motion Gebrian; Second Lawler: Approved 5-0
 - d. November 10, 2022 – Motion Gebrian; Second Lawler: Approved 5-0
 - e. December 1, 2022 – Motion Gebrian; Second Lawler: Approved 5-0
 - f. December 15, 2022

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

3. None.

ADJOURNMENT: 6:00 PM

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Essie Labrot, Town Clerk