

Issued August 25, 2023

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 2023
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

AGENDA

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair, Ray Giolitto; Members: Elizabeth Pang, Kimberly Parsons-Whitaker, Hugh Sweitzer. Alternates: David Hines & Jim Lawler

ABSENT: Brian Flemming & Jenna McClure

Staff: Brian Pudlik, Senior Planner

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN PLANNER:

1. **1244 North Main Street** – Initial study session preparatory to the submission of a potential new Special Development District application. The application contemplates the redevelopment and adaptive reuse of a portion of the existing synagogue building with a new addition at the rear of the building, all to accommodate a new multi-family residential development.

B. Pudlik – Senior Planner – Introduced the application and provided a brief background on the history of the property and its proposed adaptive reuse by the current development team.

T. Hollister – Project Attorney – Introduced the project in greater detail. Noted that the proposal is the adaptive reuse of a portion of the existing synagogue building, specifically the façade and front portion of the building, in addition to the construction of two additions, all to accommodate 49 residential units. Also noted that many of the mature trees around the perimeter of the site would be saved and the understory cleaned up and replanted to provide adequate screening to adjacent properties.

W. Violette – Project Engineer – Began by indicating that the property is currently zoned R-13, so a request to change to the zone to RM-1 will be sought, together with a Special Development District designation. Regarding the site, noted that the roadway geometry is challenging for ingress and egress, so enhancements are planned to eliminate sight-line obstructions to improve the safety of the driveway. Mr. Violette described the remaining details of the site as follows: The proposed expansion will be “L-shaped” with 68 parking spaces located generally to the east and north of the proposed building expansion. A bioretention area will be located at the center of the main parking field to help with stormwater management. Pedestrian walks will be provided around most of the building perimeter, except on the south side where the ground floor units will have outdoor patio space. Regarding landscaping, noted that the mature vegetation that surrounds the property will be preserved to every extent possible, but substantial clean-up/trimming will be necessary, particularly in the understory. An evaluation is currently being undertaken to determine how best to maintain the

existing trees. At the front of the property, ornamental street trees will be added and new landscaping will be added around the perimeter of the building.

L. Crosskey – Project Architect – Provided the following details regarding the project: The first 24 feet of the existing building will be retained as part of this project. This area will serve as a community room and two townhome-style units. The total proposed square footage between the existing and new section of the building is 59, 162. The exterior finishes of the new portion of the building will be understated and designed to compliment the architecture of the existing building. The primary entry to the building will be at the rear, but will take design cues from the building entry off of North Main Street. That existing entry will be retained, but will now serve and a “front porch” and an entrance into the community room. Regarding accessibility, all units except the two townhome units will be elevator accessible. Lastly, the environmental sustainability is an important aspect of this project with a hope of achieving an “Emerald” certification.

D. Hines – DRAC Member – Overall, the project is a slam dunk – a great reuse of the existing structure. Noted that the team should review the feasibility of aligning the exit drive with Woodmont Road to the west. In addition, would like to see a crosswalk at that intersection.

J. Lawler – DRAC Member – Very supportive of the project

L. Pang – DRAC Member – Suggests that a more robust planted buffer should be considered for the south side of the building. Noted that the architecture is very well executed. Questioned whether some of the existing stain glass from portions of the building not being saved could be reused in the new sections of the building. Architect, Ms. Crosskey indicated that they would review those opportunities.

K. Parsons-Whitaker – DRAC Member – In response to Mr. Hines comments on the exit drive and crosswalk, noted that this portion of North Main Street is a State-controlled road, which may impact the team’s ability to make those changes. Overall, noted that the project is wonderful and appreciates the respect given to the existing architecture and the efforts to save as many of the mature trees as possible.

J. Lawler – DRAC Member – Suggested the team review the placement of the handicap parking spaces to ensure optimal placement relative to the building entry.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC Member – Questioned how light would get into the lower level of the townhomes. Architect, Ms. Crosskey indicated that the slope of the land in that area exposes the lower level such that windows will be incorporated. Mr. Schweitzer then indicated that the overall massing of the project is good, particularly the relationship between the old and new sections. Expressed a concern regarding an apparent lack of usable open space for the residents. Suggested that the extended portion of the property on the south side could be programmed as an effective outside amenity space.

R. Giolitto – DRAC Member – Regarding open space, suggested that perhaps the interior corner could be programed as a small amenity space. Regarding the building, encouraged the architect to review all opportunities to bring light into the corridor that connects the old building to the new building.

2. **579 New Park Avenue** – Second study session preparatory to the submission of a site plan application under the newly adopted Transit-Oriented Development zoning district. The application contemplates the redevelopment of 579 New Park Avenue to include the demolition of the existing building and the construction of a new five story, mixed-use building with associated site improvements. (Initial study session held on May 11, 2023)

B. Pudlik – Senior Planner – Introduced the project and noted for the Committee that since the prior study session in May, the development team changed the architectural firm engaged in the project and the plans being presented are representative of that change.

T. Li – Developer – Provided some additional background on the project. Indicated that the goal is to take advantage of the newly adopted TOD standards with an emphasis on providing future residents plenty of bicycle storage, to develop a project that is forward-looking to take advantage of future New Park Avenue pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements and finally to provide workforce housing with 20 percent of the units being Qualified Affordable.

J. Selle – Project Architect – Provided site orientation relative to New Park Avenue and reemphasized the desire to take advantage of the TOD zoning bonus provisions. Noted that the site has a significant topographic change from east to west, dropping a full story on the west side of the site. Presented alternative building placements that were considered before landing on the L-shaped building being shown, which minimizes unit exposure to the west. At the front of the building, the objective is to activate the streetscape to take advantage of the future improvements to NPA that will be undertaken by the Town. Regarding the basement, due to the topography of the site, only a portion of the parking will be exposed. The majority of it will be underneath the building and at grade. The first floor will be at grade adjacent to the street with a main building entry located here, which will be flanked by commercial tenant spaces on either side. Open space for the development will be provided with an upper level and lower level due to the sloping site. Similarly, exposed parking areas will also be provided with an upper level closest to New Park, then sloping down to a lower parking area.

R. Giolitto – DRAC Member – Asked whether stairs could be incorporated into the open space areas to connect them. Mr. Selle said they would look at options to connect the open space areas. Mr. Giolitto asked about unit types. Mr. Selle indicated there would be a mix of one and two-bedroom units.

D. Hines – DRAC Member – Inquired as to the fourth story roof could be made into usable amenity space. Developer, Mr. Li indicated that due to cost considerations, that would not be feasible.

J. Lawler – DRAC Member – Also suggested that a connection from the upper open space area to the lower open space area is critical.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC Member – Stated that the building should have a distinct identity, but appreciates the direction the architect is taking with building placement, massing and articulation.

K. Parsons-Whitaker – DRAC Member – Stated that she appreciates that the development team’s vision for the property is looking to the future of the district with a focus on multi-modal transportation. Believes the owner has a good understanding of market needs with this proposal.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

1. None

TOWN PLANNER’S REPORT:

2. None

ADJOURNMENT: 6:05 PM

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Essie Labrot, Town Clerk