



Issued August 25, 2023

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**\*\*\*SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES\*\*\***  
**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2023**  
**ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

## AGENDA

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

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

**ABSENT:** None

**Staff:** Todd Dumais, Town Planner, Brian Pudlik, Senior 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, 12-15-22, 1-19-23 and 2-21-23*).

***T. Dumais – Town Planner – Introduces the project and provides the Committee with a brief history of the project to date and prior study sessions. Requests that the applicant team focus their presentation only on those elements that have changed since the February 2023 study session.***

***B. Fischer – Project Architect – Provided an overview of the changes, which included the following: the medical office building has been eliminated from the plans and an assisted living facility has replaced it in a similar location, townhomes are now proposed along Asylum Avenue and Lawler Road to act as a residentially scaled buffer to the commercial development. Some of these changes were driven by changes in potential interested tenants as well as feedback that they have received from the community. He noted that outreach to the surrounding neighborhoods had begun in earnest.***

***C. Bridle – Landscape Architect – Noted that one of the key elements of both properties are the wetland resources and that the design team views them as features that should be enhanced for the benefit of not only users of the proposed development, but the community as a whole. In order to achieve that, the team proposes a series of trails and observation decks within the wetland areas along with interpretive and educational signage that explains the inherent benefits of the wetland resources. Mr. Bridle went on to state that within the proposed development areas in the interior of the site, they plan to enhance the ponds with aeration and to provide a large patio area overlooking the ponds. Along the proposed streetscape, an emphasis will be placed on street tree placement and the entry points into the plaza will be enhanced with robust landscaping. Lastly, he indicated that the team is focused on meaningful buffers into the***

*development from existing homes on both Asylum Avenue and Lawler Road, which they will achieve with landscaped berms and the proposed construction of townhomes.*

*M. Bruton – Project Engineer – Outlined the primary changes from the prior plan presented to the DRAC to today on 1800 Asylum. The changes include eliminated the medical office building, eliminating the parking garage, relocating the spa facility to the east side of the “Main Street”, adding an assisted living facility and added townhomes along Asylum Avenue and Lawler Road. The team believes these are all positive changes that reflect feedback they received from the DRAC, members of the community and Town representatives.*

*L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Noted that the proposed townhomes on 1800 Asylum are designed to work in concert with the landscape and within the context of the existing residential neighborhood. Reiterated that the team is interested in creating both passive and active recreational opportunities throughout the site. Within the streetscape, the team proposes raised planters and wide sidewalks with furniture zones.*

*M. Bruton – Project Engineer – Regarding 1700 Asylum, building “E” has been eliminated from the plans. The overall unit count has been reduced by 70 to 372. Some of the one-story garage buildings have been eliminated and the overall number of parking spaces has been reduced by 52 and reductions impervious area are proposed throughout the project area. Buildings “A” & “B” now have the 5<sup>th</sup> story stepped back from the street by 30 feet to reduce massing.*

*Michael – Minno & Wasko Architects – Regarding 1700 Asylum, reiterated the changes described by Mr. Bruton. Noted that the overall parking ratio has been reduced to 1.77 spaces for unit and garage spaces have been reduced from 77 to 30. He noted that parking areas have been moved as far away from the Champion Oak as possible. Regarding building materials, they plan on using a mix of contemporary materials such as glass and metal panels along with traditional materials such as red brick.*

*J. Lawler – DRAC member – Stated that the proposed grocery store and other retail uses are incompatible with the residential character of the neighborhood, but he supports the inclusion of assisted living.*

*K. Parsons-Whitaker – Stated that this is a unique site due to wetland considerations and that the residential make up of the existing neighborhood makes the proposed mixed-use, commercial development incompatible. She went on to say that there are some positive changes from the prior submission, however.*

*J. McClure – DRAC Member – Regarding 1800 Asylum, the proposed changes to the spa and restaurant buildings are positive. Noted that the overall massing is improved for buildings “2” & “5” (mixed-use buildings on west side of road), but in general the design vocabulary is incompatible and not in harmony with existing residential buildings. Along Lawler Road, the proposed buffer is insufficient. On 1700 Asylum, the changes to the massing reduction on the buildings adjacent to Trout Brook Drive are positive, but more work needs to be done on proposed landscaping throughout that side of the project area.*

***R. Giolitto – DRAC Member – Began by stating that some of the landscaping changes are good, but raised the following concerns regarding 1800 Asylum: Consideration should be given to reducing the number of proposed travel lanes on Asylum Avenue. The misalignment of the proposed entry drive with Fox Meadow is extremely problematic for traffic flow and due to headlight intrusion into the homes on the south side of Asylum opposite the drive. Questioned whether a signal is proposed on Asylum. Mr. Bruton stated that a parttime signal may be warranted, but they have not fully determined that yet. Mr. Bruton also responded that the team believes the offset road alignment is preferable to discourage traffic from cutting through the Fox Meadow neighborhood. Mr. Giolitto stated he was not convinced by that argument. Regarding the proposed townhomes, Mr. Giolitto stated that their proximity to the street is bothersome and wondered whether the same number of units could be incorporated into buildings “7a” and “7b” so a landscaped buffer could be provided on Asylum rather than the townhomes. He went on to state that the townhomes detract from the project as currently proposed, but if the team is inclined to keep them in the plans, they should be set back to the building line, at minimum. The residents across the street should not be subjected to buildings so close to the street. Regarding the road alignment, noted that the shape of the assisted living facility appears to driving its position and that a simple change to the architecture would eliminate the issue. Lastly, regarding parking, noted that assisted living facilities do not typically require as many parking spaces as currently proposed and the team should review their needs.***

***T. Dumais – Town Planner – Reiterated that if the townhomes are important to the team, they should be set back to the building line.***

***H. Schweitzer – DRAC member – Stated that the relationship of the development site to the neighborhood is extremely important and that future presentations should more clearly depict all adjacent residential properties. On 1800 Asylum, appreciates the position of buildings “7a” and “7b” that flank the new roadway, but that the misalignment of the road with Fox Meadow is a critical issue that must be addressed. In future presentations, requested that the design team provide pedestrian-scaled sections through various locations on the proposed “Main Street”. On 1700 Asylum, questioned whether a gate is proposed to restrict access to the apartment buildings. Mr. Bruton indicated that a gate is proposed, but is set back far enough to allow enough que length and to allow vehicles that enter the site inadvertently to turn around. In response, Mr. Schweitzer stated that a gated entry gives the impression that the project is “apart from the community rather than a part of the community”, which is problematic. For future presentations, requested dusk renderings.***

***L. Pang – DRAC Member – Stated that she is troubled by the wall of buildings proposed along Trout Brook Drive on 1700 Asylum and would prefer to see a more substantial planted buffer between the street and the buildings. Regarding the Champion Oak, remains concerned that there is not enough buffer between the parking lot and tree.***

***J. McClure – DRAC Member – Suggested that the proposed maintenance garages on 1700 Asylum be relocated and that some of the landscape design concepts from 1800 Asylum should be incorporated into the area instead.***

***B. Flemming – DRAC Member – Are there any plans to enhance St. Joseph Brook. Mr. Bruton indicated that their wetland mitigation plans do include enhancements to the brook.***

***T. Dumais – Town Planner – Reminded the team that any design-related changes that may result from DRAC review and comment could have implications for the pending wetland permit applications.***

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:**

2.
  - a. March 9, 2023 – Motion/Parsons-Whitaker; Second/McClure - Vote 5-0
  - b. April 20, 2023 – Motion/McClure; Second/Pang - Vote 5-0
  - c. April 27, 2023 – Motion/Pang; Second/McClure - Vote 5-0

**TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:**

3. None

**ADJOURNMENT: 6:05 PM**

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director  
Essie Labrot, Town Clerk