

Issued February 8, 2024

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024
ROOM 400, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair, Ray Giolitto; Members: Brian Flemming, Jenna McClure & Elizabeth Pang
Alternates: David Hines & Jim Lawler

ABSENT: Hugh Schweitzer

Staff: Todd Dumais, Town Planner; Brian Pudlik, Senior Planner

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN PLANNER:

1. **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 at 1800 Asylum Avenue. The applicant contemplates the redevelopment of the parcel with multifamily housing and mixed-use development including commercial, retail, restaurant, and other residential uses. (*Initial study session on 10-27-22, last study session 11-16-23*).

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Provided brief introduction of the project evolution and noted that the primary objectives for this meeting would be to evaluate road alignment options on Asylum Avenue, revised building massing on Lawler Road and proposed screening of grocery on Lawler Road.

B. Fischer – Project Architect – Reiterated the same priorities for the meeting.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Discussed early versions of a potential aligned arrangement of Fox Meadow Lane and the primary site drive for the project. Noted the team initially looked to maintain the same number of townhomes, but moved instead to an option with two larger buildings flanking the east and west sides of the site drive, with two townhome buildings along Asylum and the to the east of the site drive. She then presented a recap of the prior design with the misaligned road arrangement so the Committee could review them side by side. Next, she presented site sections through Asylum Avenue to show the difference is grading and massing that would occur with the change in road alignment. She also noted that the new aligned layout would allow them to preserve more existing trees than the misaligned layout, which required more grading work.

On Lawler Road, Ms. Gilmore presented a change to the scale and parking layout for the proposed townhomes. The new proposal calls for townhomes that have been reduced by a story to match the scale of existing homes on Lawler Road. In addition, individual townhome curb cuts were eliminated in favor of a single curb cut to access a unified parking area behind the buildings.

Lastly, Ms. Gilmore presented a site section through Lawler Road to show the distance from the proposed grocery store to the road. In addition, she showed the proposed screening elements, which will include a planted berm with a mix of trees, shrubs and grasses. She noted that the planting scheme will mimic the plans for the rest of the development.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Stated that the proposed changes to the townhomes and parking arrangement on Lawler are virtually perfect. Regarding grocery store screening, noted that he believes there may be code-related screening requirements and looks to the Town Planner for confirmation.

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Confirms that the parking area must be completely screened from the Lawler Road with what the code identifies as “Type-C”, which is a complete visual screen.

M. Bruton – Project Engineer – Acknowledged the requirements and noted that the team is trying to balance berm placement and design with a desire to save existing mature trees.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Stated that the new proposed road alignment is preferable. Regarding the changes to the proposed residential buildings, stated that the scale of the larger buildings that flank the site drive are appropriate, as is the revised internal parking layout and the position and scale of the assisted living facility. The remaining architectural concerns are the flat roofs on the larger buildings, which appear out of context, in addition to the scale of the remaining townhomes and their individual curb cuts. He encouraged the team to review an option on Asylum that more closely resembled the scale and layout of the Lawler townhome proposal.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Stated, in response to Mr. Giolitto’s comments, that their client desires a “higher end” housing project on Asylum, which dictates individual attached garages rather than a common parking field.

B. Fischer – Project Architect – Added that a product similar to that of the proposal on Lawler would also mean eliminating the backyard space for the townhomes on Asylum, which is also undesirable for their client.

R. Giolitto – DRAC member – Encouraged the team to review alternative options, even if that means pushing the buildings forward of the building line by ten feet to free up space in the rear.

J. McClure – DRAC member – Questioned why the large building flanking the site drive are not aligned at the front. Ms. Fischer stated it was due to setbacks, but they would happy to adjust them if the Committee felt as though that was more important the holding the setback. Ms. McClure suggested it should be reviewed. Regarding the other elements presented by the design team, Ms. McClure indicated a strong preference for the aligned site drive with Fox Meadow and the updated shape of the assisted living facility. She stated that any landscape berms on Asylum should be eliminated, which would help to stich the development into the existing neighborhood. On Lawler, she indicated

that the landscape berm is more important to screen the grocery store. Overall, she noted all of the proposed plan changes are positive.

B. Flemming – DRAC member – Stated that the overall plan changes are excellent, but stated that consideration should be given to increasing the density of plantings between the proposed townhomes on Lawler Road and the grocery store in order to provide a visual screen and separation between the two proposed uses. On Asylum, encouraged the design team to look carefully at traffic calming opportunities at the intersection of Fox Meadow and the primary site drive in order to discourage cut-through traffic.

L. Pang – DRAC member – Stated that she appreciates the plan changes overall, but asked whether the eastern-most townhome on Asylum could be moved to the west to reduce the wetland impact. Mr. Bruton indicated that it could be and agreed that would be a beneficial change. She then asked the design team how landscaping maintenance would be handled. The team indicated that comprehensive plans will be in place for both wetland mitigation planting maintenance as well as for the rest of the site.

D. Hines – DRAC member – Suggested that a round-about may be a good option to review at the Fox Meadow/Site Drive intersection, indicating that not only would it serve a traffic calming function, but would also allow for an overall reduction in new pavement in that area. He then questioned whether there would be bus stops, to which the team responded yes. Overall, Mr. Hines stated it liked all of the new proposed plan changes. Lastly, he questioned whether there may be opportunities to reconfigure the parking lot at the southwest corner of the site to reduce wetland impacts and to introduce bioswales or other LID methods into the plan. Mr. Bruton stated that the property is under-parked as currently laid out, so losing parking in this area is likely not possible, but the team will look for opportunities to reconfigure the layout.

No formal action was required or taken by the Committee on this item.

2. **579 New Park Avenue** – Formal referral from the Town Planner on a Site Plan Application #1432. Application submitted by Hexagon New Park, LLC for 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. (Study sessions held on 5-11-23, 8-17-23, 9-14-23 and 10-12-23).

B. Pudlik – Senior Planner – Provided a brief background on the project and reminded the Committee that during the prior study session in October, the same project was presented and that no changes had been made between that time and current submission. Mr. Pudlik also pointed out that the Committee was universally supportive of the project at the October meeting and, at the time, encouraged the team to pursue a formal application submittal. The team did so, and submitted a formal site plan application for staff review. As part of that process, staff is seeking a formal vote from the Committee as to whether the design elements of the project are supported.

Committee member Jim Lawler made a motion to recommend that the project be approved. Second by Committee member David Hines. In making the motion, Mr. Lawler noted the extent to which the design team worked with DRAC to improve the project and in addition, that the project is consistent with the Committee's Performance Criteria.

Unanimous Vote 6-0

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

1.
 - a. January 18, 2024 – ***Motion; Pang /Second; Hines: Vote 4-0***

COMMUNICATION

3.
 - a. None

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

4. None

ADJOURNMENT: 5:45 PM

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk