

Issued November 15, 2024

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2024
ROOM 407, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair, Ray Giolitto; Vice-Chair, Hugh Schweitzer; Committee Members, Liz Pang & Jenna McClure. Alternates: David Hines & Jim Lawler

ABSENT: Committee Member Brian Flemming

Staff: Todd Dumais, Town Planner, Brian Pudlik, Senior Planner & Robert Gosselin, Associate Planner

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL:

1. **1800 Asylum Avenue** – Application filed on behalf of WeHa Development Group, LLC owner of 1800 Asylum Avenue, for change of zone of approximately 33.5 acres of the site from a R-10 single-family zone to a BS shopping center zone with Special Development District Designation (SDD) overlay for the redevelopment of the site into a new mixed-use development of commercial and residential uses along with associated parking and site amenities. *(Numerous informal study sessions have been held on this project, with the most recent taking place on 10-24-24)*

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Introduced the application.

R. Giolitto – DRAC Chair – Requested that the applicant provide a complete presentation on the proposed project, despite the Committee being very familiar with it, due to this being a formal referral from the Town Council.

L. Gilmore – Project Architect – Stated that this is the 13th in person meeting and 14th time overall where the DRAC has reviewed this project, with the process having started in October in 2022. She noted that over that time period, there have been many positive changes to the project as a direct result of the Committee’s feedback.

For tonight, the first part of the presentation Ms. Gilmore devoted to addressing DRAC comments from the prior study session on October 24th. The second part of the presentation demonstrated how the project is consistent with the DRAC’s Performance Criteria.

She presented the following plan changes made in response to DRAC’s comments:

- ***Regarding the formality of landscaping along Asylum Avenue and Lawler Road, the plans remain to provide ordered shrubs, grasses and trees to provide a buffer from the public way to the residential townhomes, which are broken up by sidewalks to the individual buildings. A traditional lawn will be provided behind the shrubs.***

- *In response to the comment regarding deciduous vs evergreen trees in the project area, evergreen trees are now shown on the site plan. Evergreens have been added throughout the site, including on the southerly portion of wetland 4, which helps to buffer the development along its edges. Views from Asylum will now incorporate evergreens to provide foliage year-round.*
- *Regarding the comment on the proposed trash/recycling enclosure that will be used, the enclosure will be a panelized wall system with stone veneer along with a metal panel gate.*
- *In order to address the concern regarding the large gables on building 7A/7B, vents have been incorporated to break up that large area.*
- *In response to the concern over maintaining an EPDM roof material on the lower building 3 roof, a “green” planted roof of sedums is now proposed.*
- *In response to the concerns related to the seat wall behind building 3, a leaning rail has been added at the top of the wall to prevent falls, steps have been provided down to lower level and an ADA ramp to the lower level has been incorporated.*

Ms. Gilmore then presented how the project is consistent with the DRAC’s Performance Criteria by stating the following:

- *The buildings are organized such that larger buildings are pulled into the middle of the site with smaller residential scale buildings placed at the edges of the site.*
- *On the wetland side, buildings 3 & 4 are designed to be complimentary with softer edges, particularly on the east side of the buildings.*
- *Throughout the site, there are common relationships between building forms and a continuity of design, which fosters a sense of place.*
- *All of the proposed landscaping throughout the project site has been informed by the extensive wetland mitigation improvements that will be made, which also establishes a sense of continuity within the site. There is an emphasis on use of native and pollinator plant species in all areas.*
- *In an effort to be sensitive to the Lawler Road neighborhood, the proposed grocery store will be screened by an extensive planted berm in addition to a stockade fence.*
- *All proposed freestanding and building signs are designed to be aesthetically pleasing and at an appropriate scale to the site.*
- *All proposed building materials will be attractive, durable and long lasting.*

R. Giolitto – DRAC Chair – Asked Ms. Gilmore whether any other changes have been made to the project that need to be presented. Ms. Gilmore stated there were none.

J. McClure – DRAC member – Made a motion to Recommend Approval of this application to the Town Council. In making the motion, Ms. McClure stated that the overall application is consistent with the Committee’s performance criteria. She specifically noted the following:

1. *The relationship of the proposed buildings to the site and adjoining neighborhood is appropriate. While the collective buildings are substantial, their design – and in particular site placement and architecture - are compatible with their surroundings as supported by the following:*

- a. *The largest building locations on the property are centralized to the site and placed at points most distanced from existing adjacent residential properties to the north, west and south;*
- b. *The townhomes' height, scale, and placement along both Asylum Avenue and Lawler Road provide for a suitable transitional response to the neighborhood;*
- c. *The commitment to providing meaningful publicly accessible open space amenities throughout the project area allows for the creation of generous planted buffers;*

All of which help to create a contextually sensitive response for the redevelopment of this project site.

- 2. *The use of varied and high-quality materials, textures, and colors throughout all elements of the project is commendable. Additionally, the successful articulation of building forms throughout the project site creates a visually appealing built environment.*
- 3. *The proposed landscaping is of high quality and quantity. A nice mixture of native plantings ranging from street, flowering and evergreen trees to shrubs, perennials and grasses has been effectively utilized to create a well-designed streetscape, generous public open spaces, wetlands meadow areas and appropriately planted and screened parking areas. Of note is the Design Team's effort to preserve as many existing, mature trees as possible throughout the site.*
- 4. *The arrangement of landscaping, site amenities, and interior trash management strategy, are conducive to the overall long-term maintenance of the property.*

Ms. McClure further stated that in addition to finding the application consistent with the Committee's performance criteria, she thanked the applicant for their willingness to participate in 13 informal study sessions, to discuss & consider a variety of design alternatives; and ultimately to include many of DRAC's suggestions in the current application.

H. Schweitzer – DRAC Vice-Chair seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (5-0, Hines seated to vote. Lawler not seated) to recommend approval of the application to the Town Council.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

- 2. Minutes from the October 24, 2024 Special Meeting: ***Motion; Hines /Second; Pang. Approved***

COMMUNICATION

- 4. None

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

- 5. None

ADJOURNMENT: 5:10 PM

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk