

Issued March 4, 2025

**DESIGN REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2025
ROOM 407, TOWN HALL, WEST HARTFORD, CT**

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

DRAC ATTENDANCE: Chair, Ray Giolitto; Committee Members; Angela Cahill, Brian Flemming, David Hines, Jenna McClure and Liz Pang. Alternates: Jim Lawler

ABSENT: None

Staff: Todd Dumais, Town Planner; Brian Pudlik, Senior Planner; Robert Gosselin, Associate Planner; Duane Martin, Director of Community Development

REFERRAL FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL:

1. **29 Highland Street:** Application filed on behalf of Vessel RE Holdings LLC and Vessel Technologies, Inc., contractor purchaser of 29 Highland Street, for change of zone of approximately 2.3 +/- acres of the site from a RI single-family zone to a RM-1 multifamily residence district with Special Development District Designation overlay for the redevelopment of the site into a new 112 unit multifamily residential development which will qualify as a “set-aside development” under General Statutes Section 8-30g. Associated parking and site amenities are also proposed. *(Informal study session held on this project in August, 2024. Formal referral sessions held on December 12, 2024, January 16, 2025 and January 23, 2025.)*

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Introduced the application and provided a summary of the DRAC’s comments and requests from the prior meeting.

J. Levy – Applicant – Provided a summary of the last project updates, which included the following:

- ***Based on DRAC feedback, the building was split into two separate buildings with a landscaped path between them.***
- ***Bands of color have been incorporated adjacent to the entry vestibules and at the end of the building to “bookend” the buildings.***
- ***In reviewing the northbound perspective of the building, Mr. Levy pointed out that a large existing tree, which will remain, screens the majority of the southerly façade from view.***

E. LaBatte – Project Engineer – Stated that they looked at shifting the southerly building to the west, but determined that it would not be possible without reducing the parking count. He further stated that the site plan is relatively consistent with the prior site plan, apart from the building being split. Lastly, Mr. LaBatte stated that bike racks were incorporated on the south side of the building.

T. Dumais – Town Planner – Stated the neighborhood concerns regarding the dumpster locations and the buffer along the westerly edge of the property.

J. Levy – Applicant – Stated that through consultation with a waste management company, they relocated and split the dumpster enclosure to now provide two enclosures on the north and south ends of the parking lot. This helps to move the activity away from the residential properties to the west and reduces the likelihood of a rat problem with two enclosures.

E. LaBatte – Project Engineer – In response to the screening concern along the westerly edge, stated that the buffer is narrowest at the northwest corner and gets wider to the south. In addition to the proposed plantings, the team conducted a tree inventory and found that many existing trees are in good condition, but some are not and will need to be removed.

J. McClure – DRAC member – Asked whether lighted bollards would be used between the buildings. Mr. LaBatte stated that they would.

A. Cahill – DRAC member – Asked how residents access the trash enclosures; will they be able to exit the building through the north and south stairs or will they need to go out the main lobby door. Mr. Levy stated that residents will have to go out the main lobby door – that the end stairs are for emergency egress only.

J. Lawler – DRAC member – Asked why the end stairs could not be converted to typical entry/exits. Mr. Levy stated that those staircases are not built to provide normal egress and that the philosophy of Vessel is to only allow access through one door for security purposes.

R. Giolitto – DRAC Chair – Called for a motion on the question of whether the Committee should or should not recommend approval of this application to the Town Council.

L. Pang – DRAC member – Made a motion to not recommend approval of the application to the Town Council

A. Cahill – DRAC member – Provided a second on Ms. Pang’s motion

The Design Review Advisory Committee acted by a unanimous vote (5-0) to NOT RECOMMEND APPROVAL of the subject application finding it inconsistent with our Committee’s Performance Criteria. Accordingly, during its discussion and deliberation on this matter, the Committee specifically noted the following inconsistencies with its two most critical performance criteria:

- 1. Relationship of the Buildings and Site the Adjoining Area: The overall mass and height of the combined buildings is large and out of context with the adjoining neighborhood.***
- 2. Building Design: The building’s design, unarticulated façades, stark white coloring and blank northernmost and southernmost facades are not compatible with the neighborhood.***

While the Committee does not support a favorable recommendation on this application, it sincerely appreciates the applicant's active participation in the design review process, including multiple review sessions; its discussion of and exploration of some design alternatives; and its ultimate consideration and inclusion of a meaningful and positive change in the building massing from one volume into two.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

2. Minutes from the January 23, 2025 Special Meeting: ***Motion; Hines/Second; Lawler. Approved***

COMMUNICATION

3. None

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

4. None

ADJOURNMENT: 5:20 PM

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

Duane Martin, Community Development Director
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk