

VILLAGE DISTRICT
CONSULTANT COMMITTEE

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TOWN HALL ANNEX
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897

Robert Sanders, AIA, Chairman
Samuel Gardner, AIA, Vice-Chairman
Laura Noble Perese, Secretary
John Doyle, AIA
Megan LaBant Abrahamsen
Kevin Quinlan, AIA

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2018 SEP 24 A

BY: (K)

Village District Design Committee Meeting Minutes *
September 20, 2018

PRESENT: Rob Sanders, AIA, Chairman, Sam Gardner, AIA, Vice Chairman, Laura Noble Perese, Secretary, John Doyle, AIA and Kevin Quinlan, AIA,

PRESENT Robert Nerney, Town Planner; applicant Paxton Kinol; applicant's counsel

J. OTHERS: Casey Healy, landscape architect Kate Throckmorton, architect Tim Gooding and members of the public

ABSENT: Megan Abrahamsen

Chairman Sanders convened the meeting at 4:10 p.m. He requested the agenda order be changed for purposes of first reviewing minutes and discussing VDCC operations, policy and guideline standards.

The first order of business included a review of minutes from July 18, 2018. Mr. Quinlan referenced page 3, third paragraph clarifying that his comment pertained to the use of historically-correct architecture with respect to use of proposed brick treatment and the concept of wrapping architectural elements around back building elevations so as to establish design completeness. Motion was made to approve the minutes with committee members Sanders and Quinlan voting in favor and other members abstaining. The committee reviewed the minutes of August 21st. After a brief discussion, the minutes were approved by committee members. The committee next reviewed the minutes of September 14th. Mr. Quinlan clarified that his September 14th absence was reported in advance of the meeting. The minutes were approved as amended with Mr. Quinlan abstaining.

Discussion ensued concerning the role of the VDCC. Mr. Gardner expressed the need to work with the PZC to develop clearer standards in a manner that minimizes random discussion; by instead providing an applicant with meaningful and discernible direction.

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Mr. Gardner spoke of the nebulous terms within the guidelines, again suggesting more definitive language would be helpful. Referencing a number of standards, Mr. Gardner stated the guidelines were thorough; but felt that interpretations will be necessary when working within existing construct. Mr. Sanders stated that the review authority is currently limited to the village districts and should be applied to such areas; recognizing that greater authority may be expanded in the future. Town Planner Nerney stated that the village district guidelines are part of the zoning regulations and any change would be subject to approval by the PZC. Ms. Perese pointed out the theme and importance of enhancement and conservation; further noting the mandate for enhanced signage guidance and review. Mr. Quinlan agreed that existing terms are perhaps too broad and should be refined to produce better direction. Mr. Quinlan also commented on the overall lack of desired theme or outcome within each village area. Mr. Doyle stated the benefits of architectural flexibility by noting the eclectic mix of design; but also the need to convey an overall desired outcome or vision for each designated village area. All agreed on the need to create helpful information including establishment of design guides, "storybooks" and other useful information that encourages respectful development by better understanding the past. Mr. Gardner felt the committee, perhaps by way of committee liaison, can convey such information to the PZC. Discussion ensued concerning the usefulness of public hearings and weighed whether such a process would be duplicative of existing processes. Mr. Sanders felt that such information and input may be better suited in the development of guidelines and illustrative guides as opposed to commentary on applications.

The committee next welcomed the principal and design team representing Wilton Heights, LLC, involving the redevelopment of property at 300 Danbury Road, 3 Whitewood Lane, 7 Whitewood Lane and 11 Whitewood Lane. Mr. Kinol updated the committee concerning the proposed mixed use development consisting of 74 multi-family residential units and 23,554 square feet of retail space. Mr. Kinol provided a history of the architectural evolution of the project and spoke of changes resulting from the last meeting. Mr. Kinol spoke of the concerns over a visual gap between the two planned buildings. He pointed to a revision calling for a wood-frame open air sitting area where people could meet. Mr. Kinol spoke of color changes to the buildings and their attempt to conceal building mass and parking by rotating structures; thereby, taking advantage of the site topography. Mr. Kinol stated that the color scheme includes darker shades on the rear elevation in order to appease neighbors.

Discussion ensued concerning architectural elements, including pilasters, awnings, arcade locations, shingle style and window size. Mr. Kinol spoke of the desire to allow the building frontage to speak to the street by deemphasizing the back of the site. Mr. Sanders corrected Mr. Kinol's comment that the buildings be all of the same color, noting that the suggestion was to use colors in a manner that distinguishes separate buildings. The committee also expressed concern with the unnatural change in color and treatments

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on the rear elevations. It was suggested greater effort be made to “wrap” design around the rear elevation and dovetail or transition material changes at better-defined locations. Mr. Gardner spoke of the desire to achieve architectural completeness recognizing that design is viewed in a three dimensional manner. Mr. Sanders noted a lack of well-defined transition at the building corners.

Mr. Gardner expressed concern regarding the upper level mass appearing to float on a weaker, ill-defined first level. It was suggested greater presence be established by using stronger lower level materials and incorporating headers and columns in a manner so as to break overstated horizontal features. Awning breaks were also suggested as a means of enhancing lower level design.

Ms. Perese questioned the patch-work of awning colors suggesting a better integrated design may be more attractive. Mr. Quinlan spoke of the importance of building rigor further opining that tenant identity was less of a concern.

Mr. Sanders raised the issue of building height and how it adds to the overall mass further noting the members of the PZC are struggling with the same issue. Mr. Sanders expressed concerns with peaks rising above the level of the easterly hillside. Ms. Perese opined that the topic of height may ultimately fall within the purview of the PZC. Mr. Sanders felt there was a need to further explore the height issue in terms of impacting overall design throughout the Wilton Center district. Several committee members discussed the appropriateness of height variances in lieu of a regulatory change.

Mr. Gardner questioned the planned windows on the brick building and asked that information be provided regarding the overall size and ratio of window to building façade. Mr. Kinol responded by stating that they would review the matter.

Ms. Perese queried the applicant concerning landscaping improvements and how such features would integrate with planned structural improvements. In response, Ms. Throckmorton spoke of on-site plantings along the highway frontage as well as off-site plantings at the westerly intersection of Ridgefield and Danbury Roads. She noted the desire to avoid wetland disturbance between the two buildings; but also mentioned the opportunity to establish a walking trail along an easterly upland area. Discussion ensued regarding the open shed area and types of surface material anticipated for this area. Ms. Throckmorton stated that lighting and crosswalks would be designed to match with existing downtown features. The issue of roof areas was also discussed. Ms. Throckmorton pointed out that several rooftop areas would be landscaped through the use of planters and pedestrian surface treatments.

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It was suggested the applicant work on further refining the plans and suggested the applicant meet again with Committee. The applicant agreed to this approach. There being no further discussion, the Committee adjourned the meeting a 6:15 p.m.

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