

THE GLASTONBURY ARCHITECTURAL & SITE DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2023

The Glastonbury Architectural and Site Design Review Committee with Shelley Caltagirone, Director of Planning and Land Use Services, in attendance, held a Special Meeting at 5:00 P.M. in the Council Chambers of Town Hall at 2155 Main Street with an option for Zoom video conferencing. The video was broadcast in real time and via a live video stream.

1. ROLL CALL

Commission Members Present

Mr. Brian Davis, Chairman

Mr. Mark Branse, Secretary

Mr. David Flinchum

Mr. Jeff Kamm

Mr. Robert Shipman

Ms. Amy Luzi

Commission Members Absent

Ms. Debra DeVries-Dalton, Vice Chairman

Chairman Davis called the meeting to order at 5:00 P.M. Ms. Caltagirone explained that this is a very preliminary discussion, with no formal agenda packet. She asked the committee to focus their conversation on the form and character of the proposed buildings, rather than the minutiae, which will be addressed later on. Chairman Davis concurred, stating that their focus will be on information regarding general building massing, configuration, relativity to proximate buildings, the sidewalk, and a generic overview of the materials.

2. Preliminary Review of revised plans for the Main Street/Hebron Avenue project - a mixed use development west of Main Street – Town Center Zone – Alter & Pearson, LLC – Will Walter, PE & Ryan Deane, PLA for Benesch - Robert A. McCall, AIA, NCARB & Gregory R. Curran, AIA for JKRP Architects - The HB Nitkin Group representing 2283-2289 MAIN STREET, LLC; MAIN STREET DEVELOPERS, LLC; MAIN STREET GLASTONBURY 2341 LLC; 2389 MAIN STREET LLC; and PINNO, LLC, applicants/property owners

Attorney Hope of Alter & Pearson, LLC explained that an architectural plan was presented in March 2021, but they have since decided to take a step back and return with a fresh project. Four different properties encompass the project, which are owned by Peter Christian and Joe Sullo. Their intention is to keep a lot of the existing curb cuts. Their prior plans were to demolish the Willard Building. After discussions with the State Historic Preservation Office, they have decided to maintain the building but strip away some of its modern additions. A one-story addition wraps around the south side. They propose to strip that off, re-expose the original structure underneath, and remove the three-car garage.

Architect Bob McCall presented the new scheme. He explained that the existing building does not comply with the required front setback, per the regulations, and that the proposed buildings are shown in compliance with the required setback. The idea is to make the scale break down as one moves along the building, to not feel as though it is one long, relentless building along Main Street. The scale will be lowered from three to two stories to match the Willard building. The site is arranged to create mostly an enclosed plaza that opens onto Main Street with residential on the upper and ground floors. The original plan included retail along the whole ground floor. The current proposal is for retail on just part of the ground floor. They intend to change the character completely on the back side, with brick and lots of glass.

Mr. Davis thanked the applicant for their reconsideration to keep the Willard building. He has heard commentary from residents that they would like to preserve the “character” of the town. He suggested taking the essence of Glastonbury’s architecture and reproducing it on the site. Ms. Luzzi agreed. She has received feedback that people do not want to see modern constructions, but something that feels like Glastonbury, especially in that area. Mr. Davis stated that this property will probably do more to re-establish the character of the town than most other properties. Mr. Kamm remarked that he did not like the previous proposal because it was too modern. He likes the idea of this being a village. The previous rear building is a more modern loft, which is a good type of design, but does not fit on Main Street. Mr. Davis stated that it will not have the same influence as the buildings along Main Street will.

Mr. Branse finds that this plan neither picks up the Main Street rhythm and scale, nor does it stand out on its own as a “landmark” construction. He can be persuaded of either approach – matching the existing rhythm and scale or creating a new landmark that breaks from the pattern. Mr. Kamm does not want a “landmark” construction in this location. Mr. Branse added that the other threshold question is whether the on-street parking should remain or not. If there will be commercial on the ground floor, then parking is needed in the front. Mr. Davis replied that it is required to keep the existing street parking. He then noted that some other historic towns have re-introduced diagonal parking along the streets, which is a very positive feature to activate the street and space.

Architect Greg Curran explained that this open space is a perceived axis aligned with the fountain across the street. Mr. McCall loves that the parking is below and behind because they do not wish to see cars either. Attorney Peter Alter noted that the Town Council is considering a change to the regulations which would allow credits to be granted to a developer if it meets certain standards. This plan is based on that assumption. The market for retail is tough now, but the owners believe that they can get good tenants, namely an upscale restaurant and a bakery. However, market conditions could change. If there is a demand for commercial space, then they would convert the first-floor residential properties into commercial properties. Mr. Davis contended that the downtowns of Essex and Mystic are not vacant in commercial space. If the architects create an area which is attractive for retail and dining on Main Street, then people will come.

Mr. Branse believes that this concept is wrong from the get-go. If they seek a residential development, then they should create their own hub and stay off Main Street. Mr. Davis countered that most architects will not agree with that statement. A public plaza is a positive

force when there is retail and residential activity. Ms. Luzi asked if residents will be upset that children will be hanging out at the plaza. Mr. McCall stated that it is a public space but will not be very big. Mr. Curran added that this portion is what will draw in the public. Mr. McCall explained that the retail/restaurant will be all glass with typical Glastonbury-sized windows. The best piece of the restaurant is the big outdoor space.

Mr. Kamm knows that this is a setback issue. Mr. Alter stated that they could pursue a special exception from the ZBA to go no closer to the frontline than the existing building. Mr. Davis is not excited about the views, as he sees it as more streetscape as opposed to greenspace. Mr. Shipman concurred, adding that there is not enough greenspace to work with the size of these buildings. Mr. McCall stated that the deck is the nicest piece, but beyond that is just parking. Even with landscaping, the architect did not think anyone would be drawn to walk to the end of the “L” shaped deck/plaza, which is why they are not building it. Ms. Luzi stated that part of that is public parking. She asked if there would be stairs. Mr. McCall replied yes, there will be a formal way to descend, which is open to the public.

Mr. Davis finds the line marking the end of the public plaza to be ambiguous. It should relate to the edge of the building, as this is a village, not a suburban development. Right now, it is an alley, not a plaza. The residential building, as perceived from the public side, to be built on stilts will allow one to see the parking below. He understands that it is a cost, but the units will achieve more if people can walk out to a beautifully detailed and articulated public space. Ms. Luzi added that it is important to feel that one can go in either direction, when exiting the parking door, to not feel trapped.

Mr. McCall suggested sliding the retail forward and installing similar residential units behind that. Ms. Luzi remarked that there could then be another opportunity for balcony units. Mr. Branse does not think it should be flat across. Mr. McCall agreed. Ms. Luzi stated that the plaza in-between must be treated the same way. People need to feel like the space is open. Mr. Davis agreed: For village districts, there is a difference between seaside villages and rural villages; Glastonbury falls in the latter group. This means that buildings will have the same scale but need air around them, so the building at front should really be two buildings. Ms. Luzi asked to think about the perception of air between the buildings. Mr. Branse believes that the facade should try to mimic this rhythm and scale. Mr. Davis stated that it should seem like they are different buildings; not built at the same time. Mr. Kamm is bothered by the different scales in the middle. He thinks that the idea of separate buildings might be able to mask some of that.

Mr. Davis thinks that it should be a balanced facade with a corner, not a symmetrical facade. Mr. McCall explained that they tried the opposite approach. Mr. Davis asked them to think about what the signature element of this project will be. Ms. Luzi noted that that corner is going to get a lot of eyes. People will want to see a view down Hebron Avenue. For her, the start of the project is the little plaza. As one looks in from Hebron Avenue, the site should be brought down at the edges to a human scale, and patios with plantings should be added. Mr. Kamm stated that Glastonbury does not have loft-type spaces, so that will be very desirable. Mr. Davis supports the idea of the two buildings looking different. Mr. McCall stated that is completely doable.

Ms. Caltagirone pointed out an area that she finds problematic: Where they are undercutting the volume of the building at the corner of the plaza is a little disturbing to the eye. She would like to see a more traditional building form. The fact that it is not holding the corner there looks unbalanced to her. Mr. McCall stated that they will work on that.

Mr. Branse stated that the back is not Main Street, so there is flexibility to raise the elevation to make up for the loss of units in the front. Ms. Luzi does not want the end of this to overpower the Daybreak building. She noted how successful Rooftop 120 is. If a restaurant is placed on the second floor with a balcony, that would drop the scale and bring life to that corner. She then asked if the Willard building would stay retail or become residential. Mr. Alter stated that, in likelihood, it will all be commercial, not residential. Mr. Davis asked why they are saving the garage. Ms. Hope explained that it is on the federal historic register. Mr. Davis suggested looking at the mill buildings in town. There are two kinds of mill buildings, and this site sort of falls in the middle. There should be a decorative cornice that is flush with the building.

Attorney Alter summarized the points made by the Commission:

- First, that the ASDRC supports moving the building forward, toward Main Street.
- Second, they need to have that open space continue to a well-defined end, which connects to what they are doing to the south.
- Third, they need a better idea of what they are doing in the rear, particularly as it concerns landscaping and plantings. They will work simultaneously on designing landscaping at the front, as well.
- Fourth, the northeast corner building did not receive a consensus tonight, though commissioners seemed to agree that the massing was too long. Mr. Branse noted that a few suggestions were made, including a possible articulation on the corner or a terrace for the restaurant - anything to step it down and make it different. Mr. Kamm suggested the idea of a tower-ish element on the corner. It does not need to be symmetrical. Ms. Luzi stated that if they pursue the rooftop idea, it should face Main Street.
- Mr. Branse added that the Main Street facade needs to pick up the rhythm of southern Main Street. Mr. Kamm clarified that it needs to create a rhythm because there is none there now.

Mr. Davis is not fearful of density or massing. He is fearful of lousy design, meaning that it is inappropriate within the context. The character needs to be less interpretive and more reproductive. He is confident that the applicant will return with a mill building that the commission will approve. They will have a difficult mission in getting others to appreciate that. Mr. Branse agreed that there will be pushback, and the committee must be ready to defend the need for concessions. Mr. Kamm stated that there is a surplus of parking here. He asked to plant more trees. Mr. Alter countered that there is a tremendous parking strain on Main Street. Ms. Luzi would like the three trees to be saved. Mr. Flinchum stated that there is an opportunity here to emphasize pedestrian and vehicular entrances to invite people in.

With no further comments or questions, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 7:04 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lilly Torosyan

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Recording Clerk