

June 25, 2004

Ron Van Winkle, Director, Office of Community Services
West Hartford Town Hall
50 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107

Dear Ron:

The following briefly summarizes our conclusions about the Blue Back Square (BBS) project proposal. We believe the project will grow West Hartford Center in a way that respects the successful—and much-loved—aspects of the Town. The proponent met with us on three occasions, listening to our concerns and providing revised project plans reflecting thoughtful responses. The points below describe how our discussions improved the urban design of the project and its context.

The project preserves the civic character of South Main Street. The design of the new building at the intersection with Memorial Road (incorporating retailer *Crate & Barrel*) has been modified to ensure:

- that the building no longer encroaches upon the “town green” which lines this side of the street, and
- that the design will not mimic the historic architectural character of existing civic buildings, which is appropriate given its different usage (commercial/retail).

Blue Back Square invests in public open spaces accessible along the exterior of the project site.

- “Symphony Hill” will be a highly visible lawn surrounded by public uses and sidewalks, for hosting public events and helping to activate the intersection of South Main and Memorial. (Also improving this increasingly important downtown crossroads will be a new plaza on the northeastern corner, which will provide a more urban pedestrian experience at this location.)
- The location of the triangular lawn within the parking near City Hall has been shifted.
 1. Pedestrians moving through the surface parking can now approach this important civic building via a park walkway aligned with the entrance. This will also help increase awareness of the existing memorial at this location.
 2. Surface parking has been reconfigured to introduce a flexible space between the triangular park and the garage, where a hard surface and the absence of landscaping and barriers enable the accommodation of events such as *Celebrate! West Hartford* (and others involving heavy vehicles, large equipment and a great deal of foot traffic).
- The surface parking lot has been redesigned to ensure the new garage—sited on the interior of the block—is adequately screened from surrounding homes by three rows of landscaping elements.
- The lawn near Trout Brook will become more accessible through short-term improvements, including raising the grade to the same level of the existing sidewalk along Raymond Road.

BBS should connect to the retail and institutional destinations of the existing Town Center and vicinity.

- The new theater now has a second entrance, nearer to South Main Street. This will activate the exterior of the project, making it easy and attractive for pedestrians to enter the interior of the block.
- However, Isham Road south of Memorial Road resembles a private driveway. As a vehicular access road that doesn’t connect through to a street and does not have sidewalks on both sides, it discourages pedestrians to use it for walking from Memorial Road to the entrance of Town Hall. This is an important connection and can and should be improved with additional pedestrian amenities.

The proposal has achieved a level of quality that the Town should be proud to approve and welcome. We congratulate the Town of West Hartford on their proactive planning and review practices, and wish you the best of luck in future phases of this well-designed project.

Sincerely,

Alan Mountjoy, Principal, Chan Krieger & Associates
Kimberly Jones, Senior Planner/Project Manager, Chan Krieger & Associates