

UNION STUDIO  
ARCHITECTURE & COMMUNITY DESIGN

## MEMORANDUM

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TO: Hiram Peck, Director of Planning and Community Development, Avon, CT  
FROM: Union Studio  
SUBJECT: **Peer Review of Carpionato Plan for Avon Village Center**  
DATE: October 19, 2015  
PROJECT: Avon Village Center

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Mr. Peck,

Union Studio has reviewed the following documents as it relates to the design for Avon Village Center

- Avon Zoning Regulations Applicable to the Avon Village Center Zone
- Plan of Conservation and Development Appendix A: Avon Center Study, adopted May 2006
- Plan of Conservation and Development Appendix B: Design Guidelines and Recommendation for the Avon Village Center Zone, adopted 6/28/11
- Approved Conceptual Site Development Plan by Ensign-Bickford Realty Corporation, dated 2/6/12
- Town Center Master Plan Booklet by Carpionato Group, dated 7/28/15
- Town Center Master Plan Booklet by Carpionato Group, dated 9/29/15
- Low Impact Development Presentation by Fuss & O'Neill, dated 9/29/15
- Traffic Presentation by Fuss & O'Neill, dated 9/29/15

In addition to the review of these documents, Union Studio visited the site and gathered additional background information in a meeting with yourself and Steven Kushner on October 14, 2015.

Based on the understanding we have of the project from the above information, we have reviewed the latest plan submitted by the Carpionato Group (dated 9/29/15) against the principles established in the Purpose of the Avon Village Center Zoning Regulations and would like to share the following findings and recommendations:

**Program:**

1. The overall development includes approximately 750,000sf of non-residential development which is much higher than the 500-600,000sf called for in the Avon Zoning Regulations.
2. The overall development includes 314 apartments which is much lower than the 400-500 units called for in the Avon Zoning Regulations.
3. Of these, 60 apartments appear to be in mixed use structures, which do meet the 10% minimum called for in the Avon Zoning Regulations.
4. While the above does suggest a mixed use program overall, the current site design largely segregates the residential components from the non-residential components. In combination with other elements described below, the result feels like a collection of separate projects rather than feeling like an interconnected, mixed-use community.
5. In particular, roughly 2/3 of the units (212 of 314 proposed) are located on the Knoll, which due to topographic and easement challenges will have a tenuous connection to the larger community at best.



6. The remaining units, while in the Main Street area and mostly in mixed-use structures, are located at the periphery, not the center where they could help create more activity and better define the Village Green space at the core.

*Recommendations:*

- a. Consider a higher number of units and lower amount of non-residential units in keeping with the desired intent and to create a more mixed-use community overall.
- b. Concentrate mixed-use structures at the core of the Main Street area in order to create more activity and better define the Village Green space. (see Sketch #3)

**Street Framework:**

1. The proposed street network in the Carpianto plan conceives of a large amount of rework of the roadways at the core of the development.
2. Most apparent is the reconfiguration of Bickford Drive which is proposed to serve as a more centralized spine through the development. This has the following advantages:
  - a. The reconfigured intersection at Route 44 affords the opportunity to visually clue motorists on Route 44 to the presence of the new development that might otherwise go unnoticed.
  - b. The reconfigured Bickford Drive provides an intuitive route through the site to the various commercial components and should reduce the amount of traffic coming into close proximity of the existing residential neighborhoods off of Climax Road.
  - c. The trade-off of this configuration is the potential for motorists to use Bickford as a bypass around the intersection of Routes 44 and 10. In addition, the character of the roadway has the potential to split the site rather than helping each phase feel seamlessly connected.
3. The resulting street framework begins to suggest a hierarchy of streets that will be helpful to understand as it relates to their design.
  - a. Bickford Drive serves as the primary spine that organizes the larger site. While heavy amounts of traffic can be expected, care needs to be given to its treatment at intersections where higher levels of pedestrian activity are to be expected.
  - b. Main and North Main Streets will have the highest levels of pedestrian activity and care should be taken to design an environment that facilitates vehicular movement but not at the expense of pedestrian safety.
  - c. Ensign Drive has little frontage and primarily serves as parking access and as a limited bypass within the core area. Detail should still be given to pedestrian movement though as this roadway serves to connect the Main Street area to the Avon Town Green and the Park in the NE corner of the development.
4. Both the commercial area referred to as the Square and the residential area referred to as the Knoll are currently configured as parking fields and don't have roadways. The result is these areas feel disconnected from the larger area and have a character vastly different from the Main Street portion of the project.
5. Traffic calming measures should be considered at the locations highlighted in the submission booklet. In addition to the strategies listed, the design should also consider the positive traffic calming effects of



including narrow streets, on-street parking, regular street trees and pedestrian crossings. It would also seem that the rotary proposed at the intersection of Bickford and Ensign Drives is out of scale for this location. Rotaries are more appropriate for high volume intersections that don't have a high amount of pedestrian activity.

*Recommendations:*

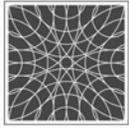
- a. Bickford Drive should be designed to modulate its character as it intersects with Main and North Main Streets in keeping with the higher intensity of uses and number of pedestrian crossings at these key locations. While the median could be retained, the edges could take on more of the character of the proposed Main Street treatment (on street parking, wide sidewalks, building entries, etc.) Such a treatment has the added benefit of helping calm traffic at these locations as well. (see Sketch #4)
- b. At 30' wide, the two way travel area for vehicles as shown in the typical street design seems overly wide. If possible, this dimension should be reduced in order to slow vehicles and reduce pedestrian crossing distances.
- c. The entry to the Square should be reconfigured to serve as an extension of North Main Street, including the reconfiguration of this area to have additional frontage along the access (see below for more information). (see Sketch #5)
- d. Access to the Knoll should also be reconfigured to feel more like a street that gives a more neighborhood feel and provides addresses for the residential buildings. Consider locating this road between the buildings and the linear easement park (creating building fronts) with the majority of parking located to the rear of the buildings. (see Sketch #6)
- e. Rotary seems unnecessary at intersection of Bickford and Ensign Drives. Would suggest focusing on other more pedestrian scaled treatments.

**Pedestrian/Bike Network:**

1. In keeping with the disparity between street networks between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 areas, the pedestrian network in these areas has two vastly different characters.
2. Connections through the Square to the Knoll are also weak which works against the goal of making the larger development feel like a mixed-use community.
3. The proposed bike path location seems reasonable as it allows cyclists to come into close proximity of the Main Street area without having to travel directly through this area of high pedestrian activity.
4. On a similar note, the distribution of bike racks seems reasonable for the commercial areas, although consideration needs to be given for them in the Knoll area.

*Recommendations:*

- a. A reconfiguration of the Square can allow for a more intuitive, seamless pedestrian connection up to the Knoll. (see Sketches #5 and #6)



### **Building Locations and Frontage:**

1. Along Main and North Main Streets building frontages are generally along the lines of what would be hoped for. The incremental scale of buildings is also appropriate towards achieving the feel of a more historic main street and to relate to the scale of the existing Brownstone structures.
2. That said, the configuration of new buildings around the existing Brownstone structures seems congested, with a lack of hierarchy between the smaller courtyard spaces.
3. On a related note, the Farmington Valley Arts Center seems lost behind this new collection of buildings. Care should be taken to give it a presence as it will serve as a cultural asset for the new community.
4. Currently building R6 is shown with a limited amount of frontage on Bickford Drive, but it would seem there is also a lot of potential frontage along the natural park space that serves as an informal extension of the Village Green facing North Main Street.
5. The current plan shows no real connection to the Town Green that exists at the corner of Route 44 and Ensign Drive. This space not only serves as an asset for the larger Avon community but could also be thought of as a secondary point of access to Main Street. Care should be given to this stretch of Ensign Drive and Buildings R22 and R23 should be designed to respond to this adjacency via additional frontage and improved access.
6. While the configuration of the buildings at the Square has improved relative to the previous Carpionato plan, the current layout still results in a radical shift from the Main Street area and doesn't provide a seamless transition on to the Knoll. While the liner buildings do follow the edge of Bickford Drive, it's hard to imagine the building entries won't end up facing into the large parking field. These are also separated from Bickford by a vegetated buffer and deep setbacks that further suggest a departure from the approach used in the Main Street area.
7. In addition, the northern terminus of North Main Street becomes nothing more than vehicular access to the large parking field. In this regard, the earlier Carpionato plan was preferable in that it included a public space and building forms meant to terminate this long vista.
8. Also problematic is the location of the largest retail spaces that back up in close proximity to the existing Forest Mews community. While grade and vegetation can help screen these structures to some degree, there may still be issues of noise and odor coming from the rear service and loading areas that make this proximity problematic.
9. Although diagrammatic, the configuration of the buildings on the Knoll suggests a typology that is inconsistent with the character of Avon. As with the commercial areas, buildings should be articulated as more incremental masses even if actually connected to limit vertical circulation.
10. The current configuration includes stretches where parking areas are directly adjacent to streets. Care should be given to these edges to screen the parking areas and reinforce the street edge.

### *Recommendations:*

- a. For the area around the brownstones, consider relocating the gathering space proposed to roughly the location of Building R14 where it can serve as a central space from which the smaller spaces between buildings radiate. In addition this will give the Arts Center a more visible location and prominent role. (see Sketch #7)



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- b. Take advantage of R6 frontage along natural park space to help activate this area as an informal extension of the Village Green that helps connect the Main Street area with the Square.
- c. Make a stronger connection to the Town Green by including enhanced pedestrian access along Ensign Drive and a stronger visual connection from Main Street (potentially removing Building R22 or increasing the gap between R22 and R23). Buildings R22 and R23 should also be designed in such a manner to have frontage towards the park and avoid service entries, etc. (see Sketch #8)
- d. In order to provide a more seamless transition from the Main Street area to the Square on through to the Knoll, the liner buildings at the Square should be reconfigured to create an extension of North Main Street into the Square site, including sidewalks, on-street “teaser” parking and building entries, with the view terminated by additional structures. At this point, the sidewalks can deflect around the terminating structure and connect up to the Knoll. (see Sketch #5)
- e. In addition, the larger retail spaces should be relocated to the opposite side of the Square where they will instead be adjacent to the larger institutional uses on Fisher Drive, with potential access at the intersection with Ensign Drive. (see Sketch #5)
- f. At exposed parking edges, include a combination of landscape, fencing and/or garden structures to screen parking across from building frontages, and include a combination of landscape and berms to screen parking across from natural areas or opposing parking lots. (see Sketch #9)

### **Building Design:**

1. While not the specific focus at this stage, the character of the new buildings as represented in the renderings needs additional consideration to be more sympathetic to the character of Avon. Renderings do suggest an intention to break down the scale of larger buildings to appear more incremental which is promising.

### *Recommendations:*

- a. As the architecture is developed, the existing structure at the NW corner of Woodford Avenue and Route 44 is a good precedent for articulating a larger structure in manner that reinforces the character of the more historic fabric along Route 44.