



CITY OF WATERTOWN
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
WATERTOWN ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
149 MAIN STREET
WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472

Melissa M. SantucciRozzi, Chairperson
David Ferris, Clerk
Christopher H. Heep, Member
Michael E. Brangwynne, Member
Alexander Dale, Member
Gregory Girard, Alternate
Samuel Odamah, Alternate

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MINUTES

On Wednesday evening, March 27, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber of the Administration Building, the Zoning Board of Appeals held a public hearing. The meeting and public hearing were conducted in a 'hybrid' format with options for public participation both in-person and via remote means, in accordance with applicable law.

In attendance: Melissa SantucciRozzi, Chair; David Ferris, Member; Alexander Dale, Member; Michael Brangwynne, Member; Christopher Heep, Member; Gregory Girard, Alternate; Samuel Odamah Alternate; Also present: Gideon Schreiber, Assistant Director of Planning; Sameena Pirani, Zoning Clerk.

Absent: Antonio Mancini, Zoning Enforcement Officer; Larry Field, Senior Planner.

Chair SantucciRozzi opened the meeting and introduced the Board Members and staff. She said that only the full members would be voting this evening. All members (full and alternate) could ask questions.

Staff explained how the meeting and methods of participation for the public could be accessed remotely. Member Heep moved to enter into the executive session pursuant to G.L. c.30A, Section 21 (a) (3) to discuss litigation strategy regarding the property located at 61 Bigelow Avenue with the Board, and to return to open session at the conclusion of the executive session. Motion was seconded by Member Ferris and approved 5-0 with Member Heep, Member Ferris, Member Brangwynne, Member Dale, and Chair Santucci-Rozzi voting in favor.

Regular session resumed at approximately 7:30 pm.

Motion to approve the January 24, 2024 meeting minutes was made by Member Ferris and seconded by Member Heep. The motion was approved 5-0 with Members Ferris, Brangwynne, Heep, Dale and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

The above minutes represent only a summary of the public hearing. For a more detailed account of the meeting, please visit the Watertown Cable Access Corp channel at, vodwcatv.org/CablecastPublicSite/gallery/47?channel=3 where a video of the hearing can be viewed.

Motion to approve the February 28, 2024 meeting minutes was made by Member Ferris and seconded by Alternate Girard. The motion was approved 4-0 with Member Ferris, Chair SantucciRozzi and Alternates Girard and Odamah voting in favor.

Case #1: 221 Acton St

Chair SantucciRozzi read into the record the letter received from Edward and Claudia Hall stating that they wished to withdraw their petition for the Zoning Permit. Motion to approve the request for withdrawal without prejudice was made by Member Brangwynne and seconded by Member Girard. Motion was approved (5-0), with Members Ferris, Heep, Brangwynne, Dale and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

Case #2: 20 Thurston Rd

This case had been opened at last month's meeting held on February 28, 2024.

Upon Chair SantucciRozzi's request petitioners Ming Qiao and Mary Shang introduced themselves and described their proposal for addition.

Ming described his family's reasons for wanting to move to Watertown. His two sons attend BB&N and would be able to bike to school instead of taking the bus. The family liked to run, especially along the Charles River. Finally, they had grown to appreciate their neighbors who had been very supportive and welcoming. Ming gave the rationale for the addition. His parents plan to move in with them and he worked from home with global teams and different time zones, creating the need for additional space. Showing slides of the proposed plans, he said that the proposed style of the house and siding would match the existing. The neighbors had written to the Board expressing their approval of the project.

Following the conclusion of this presentation, Chair SantucciRozzi opened discussion to the Board.

Member Girard asked for clarification on the Staff's recommendation for the relief requested, as described in the Staff report.

Staff recommended a by right addition by putting the massing in the rear versus the front of the house, where it was within setbacks. The property was in the Two-family versus Single-family zone and closer to the street than other houses on the block. Additionally, the house had an enclosed porch unlike others on the street. While this was a preexisting non-conforming condition, adding an enclosed second floor addition would create substantially greater impact on the street and abutting homes.

Member Girard asked if the petitioners had discussed this option with their architect.

Petitioner said that building in the rear would be in their neighbor's line of sight, obstructing her "best views."

Member Girard said that he was not opposed to the petition but would reserve his final opinion after more discussion.

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Member Ferris said that he had noted that the enclosed second floor was not typical on the street but that the information provided was sufficient for him to consider allowing it. He also wanted to bring staff's attention to the omission of the right side shed dormer in the roof plans.

Staff confirmed that this dormer did not impact the petition as it was on the driveway side and not in a setback.

Member Ferris asked the petitioner what the attic study room on the third floor would be used for. The petitioner explained that it would be used by their high school son for parties and sleepovers on the weekend and for online classes during the week. Given the size and height of the skylights and proposed use of the area, Member Ferris noted the absence of egress on the third floor, a matter to be brought up with their architect.

Member Ferris agreed with staff that the projected massing on the second floor could be redistributed as it was typical on this street.

In response to Member Brangywynne's comment about reworking the interior to address the Board's concerns about massing in the front, staff said that it was outside their purview.

Member Dale had no comments and offered his support for comments made by other members.

Member Odamah noted the supportive comments from two of the neighbors. He asked if there were any neighbors who were less supportive. The Petitioner said that he had spoken to about 8 of their neighbors. All had expressed their support, especially about limiting the massing in the rear.

Chair SantucciRozzi had a few questions. She asked if the petitioners were intending to put a full foundation under the porch. Petitioner said that they had been given two options—a full foundation or columns to support the floor. She commended the petitioner's efforts to consult with their neighbors who would be most impacted by the project. Given the current size of the dwelling, justification of the investment, and needs of the family to accommodate elderly parents, she was inclined to support the second story addition within the front setback.

Member Ferris agreed with the rationale provided by the Chair. He reiterated his concerns about the egress through the skylights and suggested addressing them with a condition.

In response to his comments and concern for providing egress through the skylight, Chair asked staff if it would necessitate a dormer. Staff said they had experienced such scenarios. In this case, it would be on the driveway side where it was not within setbacks, although it might not meet the height requirements. Member Ferris suggested that this be worked out with the Building Inspector.

After confirming that there were no additional comments from the Board, Chair SantucciRozzi invited public comments both in person and via Zoom.

City Councilor Lisa Feltner participating remotely said that she had received complaints from a couple of constituents about the size of the addition. They wondered if the family was going to live there since their primary home was in Newton. She also asked about the potential use of sustainable materials for siding.

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Petitioner confirmed that this would be their primary residence. They planned to sell the Newton house once this was renovated. The house was purchased in December and is currently vacant. Future ownership plans and sustainability choices for building materials were outside the purview of the ZBA.

Petitioner confirmed that sustainability would be prioritized by the family. Member Dale asked what the heat source would be and confirmed that heat pumps could support Boston winters.

After confirming that there were no additional comments from the public and Board, Chair requested a motion to approve the application. Member Ferris made a motion to approve the application for a special permit finding to allow the second-floor addition within the front and side setbacks, as it meets the criteria set forth in the Watertown Zoning Ordinance, with the proposed conditions, as well as removal of the condition to file an amended plan set that conforms to the front yard setback, and with the addition of a condition to allow for flexibility on placement of skylights for necessary egress on the third floor in accordance with Building Code requirements, as previously suggested. The Motion was seconded by Member Heep. Motion was approved 5-0 with Members Ferris, Heep, Dale, Brangwynne and Chair SantucciRozzzi voting in favor. The Petition was approved (5-0) with conditions.

Motion to adjourn was made by Member Dale, seconded by Member Heep. Motion was approved (5-0) with Members Ferris, Heep, Dale, Brangwynne and Chair SantucciRozzzi voting in favor. (Confirm)

MINUTES APPROVED:-----