

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: January 10, 2024 PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

PRESENT: Janet Buck, Chair; Payson Whitney; Jason Cohen; Rachael Sack; Abigail Hammett (via Zoom)
Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner; Larry Field, Senior Planner

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Payson Whitney motioned to approve Minutes of the 12/13/2023 meeting.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 In favor

Janet Buck, Jason Cohen who has been representing the Planning Board on CPC has resigned, Abigail Hammett will be the new representative.

Payson Whitney motioned that Abigail Hammett represent the Planning Board on the CPC.

Jason Cohen seconded the motioned. VOTE: 5-0 In favor

Jason Cohen, it has been a please to represent the PB on the CPC since 2019.

10-30 Manley Way

Payson Whitney motioned to continue the petition to February 14, 2024 meeting as requested by the petitioner.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 In favor

CASE PENDING

313 & 275 Pleasant Street, 84 & 86 Rosedale Road, 60 Acton St

Janet Buck, this project has been presented previously and there have been 3 community meetings in the past year. We have received many comments from residents and based on those many changes have been made by the petitioner. Tonight the petitioner will present the changes.

Eric Svenson, this presentation is in a direct response to the community's concerns. The developer has had many developments in Boston.

Kai Vernstrom, we will respond to many questions from the 3 community meetings and 2 Planning Board meetings. We are showing pictures of the existing site, showing large expanses of concrete, giant curb cuts and no sidewalks. We will contribute \$1.25 million towards affordable housing, landscape existing pavements, have fewer curb cuts, site will be EV ready with 5 charging stations, available 24/7, 55 garage spaces available for residents. We are fully compliant with stretch code. Plans are shown from December 2021 to July 2022.

David Nagahiro, CBT Architects, there are lots of aspects to design. 80% of the existing site is impervious, the new design is 20%. We are trying to bring in more sunlight. Current scheme is showing tapered floor design, additional 15', by moving larger equipment further inside.

Payson Whitney, the developer should be provide additional screening around the loading area.

David Nagahiro, CBT, garage is reduced by 1 story, Rosedale side lowered by 1 floor. Reset has changed from 15 to 25 feet. Building materials are presented tonight. Bricks create silver sheen,

frames are little darker, glass is transparent. Materials similar to wood will be used on balconies, similar materials used at the garage. The project is designed to comply with Watertown noise regulations.

Cody Axness, Landscape, the center of the 0.5 acre space can be activated for community events, there are large and medium space opportunities. We will provide public access from Pleasant Street, 5 feet wide sidewalk. We are proposing retail space, shrubs, ornamental and shade trees and robust screen opportunities. We will create layer landscape on Acton Street.

Christa Lucas, the site circulation has improved, one of the curb cuts on Rosedale has been eliminated, main entrance will be on Rosedale, secondary entrance to the garage driveway, access on Pleasant Street. Permit issued to park in the garage, 4 outdoor spaces on Rosedale, 16 long term bike spaces and 4 bike spaces for visitors. Bike spaces designated last after sidewalks are completed.

Kai Vernstrom, we have 1.2 level below grade parking, area has high water table.

David Nagahiro, CBT, we have provided shadow study, spring/summer/fall and winter. We have tried to minimize the impact.

Kai Vernstrom, shadows showing will not have significant impact. Neighbors are concerned, we have conducted balloon study on December 12, took footage during peak hours, video is available. Based on the footage, there will not be major impact.

Eric Svenson, setback of the building is important. There are many 2 story buildings on Acton Street. I urge interested parties, that there can be impact on the neighborhood.

Janet Buck, we have a staff report to be presented.

Larry Field, I will focus on 5 items, this project presents big change to the neighbors. Residents got used to minor operation. The project has attempted to address the issues – shape of the site, etc. Developer focused on setbacks, zoning ordinance is based on specific criteria. One of special permit criteria deals with location, does it need more intensity. At least 3 criteria have to be met, significant conformance with design. Should the Planning Board require large setbacks – 50 feet – from the property, 10' is required, 20' is proposed setbacks not step back. Gamble design review stated that 20 feet is consistent. Many homes in the neighborhood are in the 30-35' range. Will the project adversely affect the neighborhood? The proposed use is more intense use of the site but not such that that it would prevent the Planning Board to approve the project. The structures are distributed away from the neighborhood, most cars are approaching the site from Pleasant and Rosedale Street. Shadows are not extended for much of the year. What are the benefits? Comprehensive Plan is looking for mixture of retail, residential and green space for public to use. Will the project be safe for all transportation modes, some measures need to be applied, especially within the site. Way siding plan to be submitted to staff for final approval. Does the project meet zoning requirements for parking? It does provide sufficient parking. Lab scenario has the least number of employees. TDM plan will reduce the demand for parking, 5% down from the highest. There will be shared parking with Central Rock, 55 garage spaces will be available to the neighbors for overnight parking. Surface spaces will be converted to landscape. Staff recommends conditional approval of the request for Special Permit under Sections 9.03 & 9.05.

Janet Buck, we had large number of public comments at the large meeting. We will now open the hearing to the Board. I am asking for the public to address their comments to tonight's presentation.

Jason Cohen, I would like to focus on Charles River path connection. I would like to see better connection from the site to the river.

Eric Svenson, we are proposing a connection from the bike path to the corner of Pleasant/Rosedale.

Gideon Schreiber, there are several connections to Watertown Square, behind City Hall, DCR Greenway.

Jason Cohen, I appreciate the length that the developer went to. Working with the neighbors, doing the balloon shadow study.

Eric Svenson, we worked with Emily and Council president Mark Sideris, working with the Acton Street neighborhood.

Rachael Sack, I am reviewing my comments from the last meeting, all have been addressed by the developer. The only one that was not addressed was noise.

Eric Svenson, we have to comply with the noise ordinance. This is an older building, it will be addressed by the building inspector.

Kai Vernstrom, we did base line study, we are using the best technology, we will adhere to Watertown noise ordinance.

Janet Buck, I used the decibel meter in the Watertown Public Library and measured many buildings, I did not see any problems.

Giden Schreiber, we have a condition that the base line study must be completed prior to issuance of the building permit.

Payson Whitney, it is important to have multiple hearings. I live near massive buildings that have been under construction for the last 2 years. Criteria have been met, I am concerned with the height and scale of the building. The footprint is the same, but the height is a problem. The use as developed will not adversely affect the neighborhood. It will be a large building in the neighborhood, there will be impact. I would like to add the condition regarding construction lights. I asked the building inspector about lights that stay on 24 hours per day, they need to change depending on the proximity and size of the building.

Eric Svenson, I do not see a reason why the lights should stay on 24/7. We are very responsive to such issues. The only relief we are asking for is mechanical equipment, it would be difficult to reduce number of stories.

Abigail Hammett, I appreciate the changes that were made. It is important to keep the abutters in loop.

Gideon Schreiber, there is a project that is being done in the neighborhood by the city. It will be coordinated by the city and the developer, paid for by the developer.

Abigail Hammett, increased setbacks and step backs are helpful, little more lush landscape along Acton Street would be helpful and make the area friendlier. A condition adding more variety. The 9,000 s.f. retail space could be subdivided into smaller spaces.

Eric Svenson, the area could be divided to specific retailers, restaurant/brewery. Terrific use of the space, it could be a very vibrant opportunity. I would love to have coffee shop on Rosedale side. The façade of the garage could provide space for public art.

Janet Buck, I would like to add condition to reconsider landscape on Acton Street. I am concerned about the size.

Janet Buck opened the hearing to public testimony at 9:05 pm.

Linda Scott, 55 Olcott Street, any noise from the roof is heard, it needs to meet the Watertown noise ordinance requirements. If it's not working, what would be the next step?

George Skuse, Pilgrim Rd, I am not completely against the project, but I have some concerns. The lab building is encroaching the residential neighborhood, The parking lot is untouched, large canopy trees are not yet included. Special Permit criteria mandates that the proposed project not adversely affects the neighborhood. Setbacks should be 50 feet. Acton Street is very narrow, 2015 Comprehensive Plan defines the Pleasant Street corridor, the recent Comp Plan talks about setbacks. Planning Board should use its authority to impose the 50-foot setback.

Joan Gumbleton, 32 Falmouth Street, many of EV vehicles and scooters do start fires, if it happens in the garage, it would affect the neighborhood. Garage entryway goes up and down, will it be noisy? I am concern about the construction, and vehicle parking during that time, will they park in the neighborhood? Noise from the trucks delivering materials and backups. If there is a Farmers Market, will cars park in the garage?

Eric Svenson, cars will park on site and then relocated to other sites during construction. Parking garage will be used as much as possible, dumpsters located within the building.

Andy Walsh, abutter, when a project starts, there is lots of dust and noise. People who go to the gym, park in the street. This building will be 6 stories high, it will not help the neighborhood. What time will the construction start in the morning?

Eric Svenson, Andy is our direct abutter. I stopped by his house, we will do the best we can. When is the project complete, it will improve the neighborhood.

Kathy Breen, 186 Boylston St, this project will benefit the city. I oppose the 50-foot setback, what is wrong with parking on the street. This developer has been very accommodating.

Libby Shaw, Trees for Watertown, the city should follow the Comprehensive Plan. We appreciate the efforts of this developer. 50-foot setback is very valuable. If trees are placed on Acton Street the developer should use structural soil which will allow the trees to grow under the sidewalk.

Elodia Thomas, I appreciate Payson's concern about the size of the buildings. This will impose on the entire neighborhood. More creativity is needed, more variety, much larger sidewalks, maybe sidewalks placed on the opposite side.

Eric Svenson, we did not come up with the 750' of sidewalks, this came from the planning staff.

Gideon Schreiber, the roads are on a 5-year construction street list, this will provide connection. DPW is experiencing lack of contractors, this project will help the neighborhood. The staff report has a condition about street trees and soil, that will be approved by the tree warden.

Brian Wyncoop, 46 Rosedale Rd, can we get clarification of the 20' setback from the property line. I have purchased my house with the understanding that there is 50' setback. There will not be another property requiring 50' setback. My property will get lots of shade. We have redesigned our home because of the light. All our roads go to Main Street, the topography is not affecting our houses, we are on the bottom. I am concerned with the construction plan.

Emily Izzo, District D Councilor would like to thank the developer for addressing the neighborhood concerns. This is a very residential area, this project will impact all. Is there a specific tenant for the space ?

Eric Svenson, a tenant did not yet signed up. We have been before this Board and presented the height. This is an industrial warehouse, we cannot propose any better new use. Our commitment is priority, this is a large site and the footprint is large as well.

Owen Murphy, Acton Street, staff report defends the setbacks, this is not the best comparison. Cape homes in the neighborhood are around 1000 s.f., this building is 130,000 s.f.. I am not opposed to something large, but the neighborhood needs to be considered, this structure is too big.

Janet Buck closed the public testimony at 10:05 pm.

Payson Whitney, the issue seems to be the setback, what was the setback on Sterritt site?

Gideon Schreiber, the setback was 15 feet. It was introduced to Pleasant Street corridor and adopted by Town Council, to provide various setbacks, and can be modified to create corridor. Setback on Acton Street St up to 50 feet, it cannot be parking area, defined as front yard.

Janet Buck, 50 foot setback would be detrimental to the design.

Payson Whitney, they are asking for 20-feet, 50-feet would take 30-feet of the building.

Jason Cohen, this is a transitional zone, residential and industrial. We live in Watertown because we do not want transitional zone but we need growth. We do not want to push developers away, this developer is given the City \$1.25 million in linkage fees. We need to find a balance.

Janet Buck, construction is part of life, none of us wants to live next to construction.

Rachael Sack, I live near Bemis Park, I appreciate future outlook. The final outcome will benefit all.

Abigail Hammett, the project has to be viable, the idea to increase the setback to 50 feet would not allow that. I understand the resident concerns. To cut of 30-feet will show somewhere else on the project.

Jason Cohen motioned that the Planning Board approve the request for Special Permit with Site Plan Review under Section 9.05 with conditions and additional conditions: condition #8 regarding construction lighting, #12B on Acton St landscaping, #12G public participation in design of garage trim, based upon the finding that the proposed project meets the criteria set forth under Section 9.03 & 9.05.

Rachael Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-1 Payson Whitney against

OTHER

Janet Buck, please note that the next Watertown Square Area Plan meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 6:30 pm.

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 10:45 pm.