

0814 WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: August 14, 2024 PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

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

Gideon Schreiber, tonight we have 4 members in person and 1, Jason Cohen, is remote.

CASES PENDING

6 & 12-14 Church Hill Street

Ken Leitner, Atty, the property consists of two abutting lots, approximately 6,000 s.f.. The site is not visible from Main Street. The petitioner is proposing to build two 3-unit building with 1 parking space under for each unit. The property is located in CB zone, apartments can be build as long as first floor has commercial use. This proposal is appropriate for the area, surrounding uses are more dense, this will improve the neighborhood. The proposed parking is underneath and there will be access to the roof.

Fergal Brennock, Engineer, both buildings are very similar and are the best uses for the site. There are no sidewalks because of the space constrain. The existing utility pole can be relocated to more appropriate location. The proposal has not been approved by DPW, the petition was submitted in June, there are strict guidelines.

Ken Leitner, we have provided 3 parking spaces as requested by the staff, cars can easily pull in and out of the parking area. There is sufficient parking on the street. The garage area is open. Each unit has 3 bedrooms. Second level has access 2 units, third floor consists of 3 bedroom unit. 6 Church Hill structure is little small er. The buildings are located 15-16 feet behind the Main Street buildings, this is a very tight neighborhood.

Janet Buck, it is very difficult to follow the submitted plans to see where the structures are. It would be easier to see elevations to see how the proposed structures relate to the existing buildings.

Larry Field, staff did not make recommendations in the staff report. The proposal has been discussed for the last 2 years. This is a very tight neighborhood without sidewalks. The proposed petition meets the zoning requirements, one parking space has been removed. The petitioner is asking the Planning Board to make comments/recommendations. This project will have impact on 128 Mai Street, set of retaining walls, it has not been fully addressed yet. Underground utilities are proposed but confirmation is needed from National Grid.. Final approval and comments regarding storm water from DPW have not been yet received. The petitioner has not submitted robust landscape plan. Planning Board is recommending board to Zoning Board of Appeals, they provide comments to the petitioner to be addressed at the next meeting. The final is to deny and let them continue to the ZBA.

Chairman Janet Buck opened the hearing to public comments.

Joe Post, 13 Church Hill St, I am concerned with the aesthetics. The neighborhood style is townhouses, these would have vertical faceless façade. Both structures are very high, we use our balconies, the new buildings will tower over us. They will be very close to our houses. We have little gardens, the height will prohibit the growth.

Chuck, 21 Church Lane, is it possible for Planning Board to request more visual plans to show the new buildings in relation to the existing buildings? Lots of trees and vegetation will be lost.

Michele Froc, 19 Church Hill St, I have lived here for 14 years. I want to preserve this neighborhood. The narrow street is busy with pedestrians. I am concerned with the height of the buildings.

Mary Nygren, 15 Church Lane, one of the walls will be right at the road. This is not an attractive plan, it does not fit the neighborhood which is all residential. The open garages are dangerous for pedestrians. This is not acceptable use.

Marla Feldman, 11 Church Hill St, I have lived here for 11 years, leaving Church Hill Street is very difficult, there are blind spots. It will be hard for 2 cars to fit, the structures are too big for one lot.

Mary Nygren, 15 Church Lane, this is a nice neighborhood, not just a street. The building application is for 5 spaces ? The owners of 6 & 12 Church Hill Street have not kept the property up. There are many errors in the application. Plans show 6 existing trees, there are 14. Total of 4 parking spaces. There is first floor commercial requirement in CB zone. I am viewing the application and plans as a layman. I am concerned that it was not properly submitted. More review is needed, all conditions of Sec 9.05 have to be approved. 4 townhouses at 7-13 Church Hill are in compliance. This is too large and not appropriate for this site. It will adversely affect the neighborhood. They did not keep up the properties for 20 years. This petition will create buildings that are not appropriate.

Libby Shaw, Eat Watertown, there are cluster of trees on the property, many are significant, 8 inches in diameter. Trees are for public good and should be preserved. Watertown needs a tree ordinance.

Len Holt, owner of 128-138 Main Street, we have met with the developer in June. This is a flat building, I am concerned with water and the retaining wall. Car lights need to be turned down, they are proposing 6 units, rules need to be followed.

Jessica Grimsby, 41R Prospect St, I feel for the people who live in the area. I advocate for sustainable Watertown. I was in the area this morning, there are many trees on the site that would be destroyed. The property is right in the heart of Watertown Square. Planning Board should consider how this would affect everyone. Trees are important, they are natures cooling system, it is important to keep this little pocket of trees.

Larry Field, affordable housing requirement is part of the conditions. Townhouses are currently not allowed in the CB zone. Parking spaces have change from 12 to 6. Storm water report was not included in the package.

Payson Whitney, this application is very difficult to understand. Plans are not showing context to the neighborhood, how do the buildings relate to the existing buildings. Application has not been included? The garage is open to potential intruders, it will be hard to coordinate with other homeowners. The existing building was done in 1860, is there any historic value?

Larry Field, demolition application will have to be filed, the petitioner wants to wait until they receive approval from ZBA.

Payson Whitney, they are nice buildings, why they cannot be restored/renovated? The new design does not fit the neighborhood.

Abigail Hammett, we believe that the townhouses across the street are better, but they are not allowed as per the Zoning Ordinance. The new design should be different, trees should be preserved. People own this land and have the right to develop the property. It is in the center of the City, I am not opposed to add more units but we need to be sensitive to the neighborhood. There are no sidewalks. There are some sloppy parts of the package, more visual plans are needed, the garage should be closed.

Rachael Sack, open garage is not feasible, it needs to be protected from animals, etc. Could the parking be reconfigured? We are adding more cars, can no left turn onto Main Street be added ?

Gideon Schreiber, if there is concern from the neighborhood, Traffic Commission is the appropriate authority to make the change.

Jason Cohen, all concerns have been covered with my fellow Board members and public. I am struggling to understand the plans. Buildings are 20 feet apart, almost identical. We need to see how they affect the neighborhood. Some changes can be made based on tonight's comments. The plot plan is ineligible, very confusing. Lot of information has to be changed, it is a very dense neighborhood.

Abigail Hammett, if the petition is continued tonight, the petitioner has to hire landscape architect.

Jason Cohen, it is important that an architect attends next meeting to answer our questions.

Attorney Ken Leitner asked the Planning Board to continue the above petitions to the September 11, 2024 meeting.

Payson Whitney motioned to continue the petition for 6 Church Hill Street to the September 11, 2024 meeting.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 Roll-Call/In Favor

Payson Whitney motioned to continue the petition for 12 Church Hill Street to the September 11, 2024 meeting.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 Roll-Call/In Favor

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 9:00 pm.