



Planning Board Meeting

Wednesday, November 13, 2024 at 7:00 PM
City Council Chamber Second floor, 149 Main Street,
Watertown, MA, 02472

Agenda

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, the meeting and public hearing will be conducted with remote opportunities for participation. In-person and remote participation and access methods include:

ACCESS INFORMATION:

- A. This meeting will be held on **November 13, 2024 at 7:00 PM**. Location: City Council Chamber Second floor, 149 Main Street, Watertown, MA, 02472
 - B. The meeting will be televised through WCATV (Watertown Cable Access Television): <http://vodwcatv.org/CablecastPublicSite/watch-now?site=3>
 - C. The Public may join the virtual meeting online: <https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/92709029148>
 - D. Public may join the virtual meeting audio only by phone: (877) 853-5257 or (888) 475-4499 (Toll Free) and enter Webinar ID: 927 0902 9148
 - E. Public may comment through email: pb@watertown-ma.gov
 - F. Please Visit the Planning Board Website here: <https://www.watertown-ma.gov/226/Planning-Board>
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1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

- A. Approval of Meeting Minutes
 - i. Minutes 9/11/2024
 - ii. Minutes 10/9/2024
 - iii. Minutes 10/30/2024
- B. Request for Extension
 - i. **313 Pleasant Street**-Special Permit/Site Plan Review ([PB-2023-04 SP/SR](#)) Conditional Approval (4-1), January 10, 2024. (See attached letter).
- C. **Willow Park**-Chapter 40B Project Eligibility Application to Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities: Planning Board comment opportunity. [Link](#)

2. CASES

- A. **446, 458, 500 and 550 Arsenal St-** (*Continued from 10/9/2024*)-Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Inc (ARE) requests approval of the "Watertown Mall Transformation Project" Final Site Plan Review of Phase 1 of the approved Master Plan Special Permit (PB 2023-01). [Link](#)

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: September 11, 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;
Sarah Scott - Alternate (Remote)
Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber, Planning Director

Janet Buck, tonight's meeting is remote. We only have one case that asked to be continued.

Gideon Schreiber, the Board members are remote and no one is in the audience. A new alternate member Sarah Scott is also participating.

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of 5/8/2024 & 8/14/2024 meetings.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

CASES PENDING

6 & 12-14 Church Hill Street

Jason Cohen motioned to continue the above petition to October 9, 2024 meeting of the Planning Board.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 7:05 pm.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 7:05 PM

MINUTES APPROVED: _____

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: October 9, 2024, PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

PRESENT: Janet Buck, Chair; Abigail Hammett; Rachael Sack; Payson Whitney; Sarah Scott
Sameena Pirani, Administrative Specialist; Gideon Schreiber, Director of Planning & Zoning; Larry
Field, Senior Planner

ABSENT: Jason Cohen

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Meeting Minutes for 9/11/2024 differed to the next regularly scheduled meeting on Nov 13, 2024

CASES PENDING

6 & 12 Church Hill St

Janet Buck stated that the Planning Board would make an advisory recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals, not the final decision for the two Church Hill projects.

Attorney Kenneth Leitner, representing the petitioner William Conti, owner of 6 Church Hill St, and Brianna LLC, owner of 12 Church Hill St, stated that they had come before the Board in August to seek a Special Permit under Section 5.01 for each of the projects—a new three-family dwelling on each parcel. He summarized the special permit criteria discussed at the previous hearing for the case. He said the site was an appropriate location for such use as the Zoning Ordinance allowed 3 family structures by Special Permit in the CB Zoning District. Also, it would not adversely affect the neighborhood as it was consistent with the new developments in Watertown Square, specifically the 34-unit development on Main Street and (in the future) a permitted 146-unit development (also on Main Street). There would be no nuisance or serious hazard to vehicles or pedestrians, and garage doors would be installed as requested.

Introducing other members of the team, he invited Ron Bourque, project architect, to go over the project plans. The presentation was based on the submittal dated October 3, 2024. It included grade elevation difference on the first floor of the two proposed buildings, the same elevation of the entry lobbies for the two buildings, the site plan for each building, including parking on the ground level along with other non-residential uses such as mechanicals, trash removal, and bike storage. The garage doors would have some transparency, and the rooftops would have solar panels. Also discussed were the rendered elevations of the two buildings and building materiality.

Following the conclusion of his presentation, Architect Bourque invited Andrew Leonard from Leonard Design Associates to go over the landscape plans. He described the areas available to landscape including space between the two buildings, the sidewalk along both buildings, and along the rear leading to the property line. In the rear, existing plantings would be removed and replaced with two red oaks and a black tupelo and shrub plantings

along the base of the building. The arborvitae hedge buffering the existing parking lot from the houses would be maintained as part of the construction. The infiltration structures for the site drainage restricted the plantings to shrubs versus trees.

Ken Cram, Fuss & O'Neill, (formerly Bayside Engineering) described the traffic impact of the proposed project. He said that there was not a substantial increase in traffic because of this addition, given that only 2-3 units of housing were being added. The additional 10 trips per day were not going to have a significant impact, particularly at the intersection of Main Street and Church Hill St. Describing the parking details, he stated that there would be two parking areas, each with three parking spaces. The garage door had been added for screening. He suggested the inclusion of a condition that each unit would have only one parking space with no parking in the "inner area." Appropriate signage and markings on the garage floor would also be added. The turning radius plan showed that cars could get in and out of the driveway.

Fergal Brennock, civil engineer representing the petitioners, attended remotely to answer questions.

Following the conclusion of this presentation, Chair Janet Buck invited comments and questions from the public, asking that comments be limited to 3 minutes.

Jan Nygren, 15 Church Lane, said that at the last meeting, several neighbors had expressed concern about the structure not fitting the neighborhood. Little had been done by the petitioner to address these concerns. Other concerns were as follows; the roof deck seemed "out of place," and the absence of setbacks was hazardous for pedestrians using this street as a thoroughway between City Hall and the river. The front walk was a pedestrian hazard, given that it was right outside the garage door. The parking space should have been configured to allow parking only in the garage.

Marybenham Nygren, 15 Church Lane, wanted to discuss the project considering the four criteria for a special permit which she said the petitioners did not appear to address. She stated that the location while appropriate for residential properties was not appropriate for what was proposed. The proposed structures were taller than other nearby buildings, had no front landscaping like the property across the street, and had less than two parking spaces per unit, contrary to the property across the street which with the same frontage was able to provide 2 parking spaces per unit. The second criterion, the development will not adversely affect the neighborhood, was also not addressed, as the project was part of the Church Hill/Church Lane neighborhood—not Main St which it did not abut. The roof decks were unique to the neighborhood and the proposed buildings were surrounded by one-story commercial buildings and two-story commercial and residential mixed-use buildings which had been there for the last 20 years. The third criterion that there would be

no nuisance or serious hazard to vehicles and pedestrians was also not true as the front walks were more like front entranceways and would not protect the pedestrians from cars coming out of the garage. Lastly, regarding the fourth criterion, the proposed buildings were “large, boxy, generic structures with no true front setback, no front landscaping, and no common ground-level space as is common in the neighborhood.” She hoped that the Zoning Board would not pass the project.

Libby Shaw, 73 Templeton Parkway, also representing Tree for Watertown, expressed her concern for the trees on the site. The trees were of value beyond the neighborhood and should be preserved. While one had the right to improve their property, it was also important to be mindful of the urban natural environment. From the drawings and presentation, the trees were a huge part of the site and would likely not exist if the plans were implemented.

Joe Post, 13 Church Hill St, agreed with the sentiments expressed earlier. Besides the aesthetics, he was particularly concerned about the traffic and safety of pedestrians and pets who use the street. Backing out of the garage would be a blind operation. He did not anticipate pedestrians using the overhang of the building.

Linda Miller Seder, 17 Church Lane, said she was there to support those speaking against the project. She agreed with those who had spoken against the project. Her biggest concern was for the pedestrians who used this street. Based on her observations, there were people constantly going up and down the street with carriages and dogs, especially when there were special events at the library, etc. She did not think that people would continue to walk in the middle of the street, expecting no cars. Also, given the amount of parking space available, there could be a lot more cars going in and out of that driveway than permitted.

After confirming that there were no more public comments, the public hearing was closed, and discussion was opened to members of the Board.

Given all the concerns about traffic, Abigail Hammett asked if the townhomes on the other side of the street had a sidewalk in front of the house or if the stoops opened directly onto the street with no sidewalk. Staff confirmed that currently there was no sidewalk on the opposite side of the street or in front of the proposed properties. All walkers used the street.

In response to questions about parking for other residents along the street, Joe Post said that there was a dedicated lot on their property that could fit eight cars. Cars entered from Church Hill Street.

Abigail Hammett said that the townhomes were a better use of the property. However, they were not allowed under the current zoning. Because of Zoning restrictions, the petitioners were very limited in what they could do with the site, and she found this a “very challenging property.” Under the current zoning, a three-family was all that could be built. Also, currently, there was no sidewalk on either side of the street. She said it seemed that the petitioners were being penalized for people walking on the street, which was the existing condition. Opposing more driving through Church Hill St would prevent people from moving into the neighborhood or increasing its density. Mirroring the townhomes would be a better outcome. However, it was not permitted under the current zoning. She also said that the architectural revisions made from the last meeting, including the material changes and the overhang, made the project look worse.

In response to Janet Buck’s question, Attorney Leitner said that the determination had not been made if the units were condos or rentals. Also, there would be one parking space per unit for each of the buildings. Parking of additional cars would be guarded by management. Given the upcoming zoning changes that would reduce the parking requirements in this Zone, Attorney Leitner said that they did not want to wait for new zoning.

Payson Whitney echoed the concerns expressed by Abigail Hammett. He credited the petitioners for improving the building façade since the last time. He also questioned the need for a sidewalk given the concerns raised by the neighbors and suggested its removal to prevent pedestrians from walking close to the garages. He was particularly concerned about the removal of 12 to 13 large mature trees, including some with 12’ calipers. He suggested the inclusion of some conditions to consider in their deliberations.

The petitioner's team said that revised renderings, reflecting the elimination of the trees on the street view, had been submitted after packets were distributed to the Planning Board. Payson Whitney asked if the red oaks next to the retaining wall would pose a concern over time as they spread their roots. Landscape Architect, Andrew Leonard, confirmed this stating that if trees had to be put back some of the adverse effects of it had to be faced down the road. However, he said it was worth the benefit of the canopy.

Payson Whitney also asked how parking in just-allowed spaces would be reinforced. The board discussed trash pickup and locations of the totes.

Rachael Sack said that this was a “tricky situation.” Not having setbacks made it feel denser which also affected the feel of the neighborhood. She also expressed concern about pedestrian safety and the possibility of lights from the garage bothering the neighbors across the street. She acknowledged the impact on trees and wished that the removals had been disclosed earlier to receive due deliberation and discussion. While

more housing was needed in this area, it was important to ensure the benefit to the city and the safety of pedestrians.

Abigail Hammett asked, given the limitations of the current zoning codes for this district, if waiting for the zoning changes to happen would allow a better project. Janet Buck agreed that waiting for the new codes to go into effect would be to their advantage, not only serving the petitioners better but also the neighborhood. There was agreement that this would be included in the Planning Board's recommendations to the Zoning Board.

Michael Mena gave the final remarks, addressing the concerns raised by the Board and the public. He said that waiting for the zoning amendments could increase concerns about parking and related issues. The proposed project met all current zoning requirements. The new amendments would require greater side setbacks. At the same time, they would allow more density, and more units. Having 2 three-unit buildings separated by 20 feet would allow more sunlight and air than what could potentially come in this space.

Staff confirmed that this portion of the district was not in the by-right zone in the proposed Zoning Amendments.

Michael Mena also provided the rationale for parking the vehicles further in the garage versus right at the front, aiding with maneuverability and compliance with the code. Lighting concerns expressed previously had been addressed by adding a garage door. Parking only in the designated spaces would be enforced by the management company or HOA. He also explained that the rear setback requirements had been observed, given the residential use of neighboring property, preventing the building from being pushed back. Concern about the utility pole has been addressed as the pole served power to the two lots. The petitioners had also been in discussion with EverSource and would continue to work with them. DPW had reviewed stormwater plans, and no critical issues were anticipated.

Addressing concerns about meeting the criteria for a special permit, Mike Menna said that given the expansion of housing in the city, this type of housing was not common and would help add to the variety of inventory. Also, compared to the property across the street, this project had better parking and vehicle maneuverability. He said that it was important to bear in mind that these were small sites in urban areas with difficulties and challenges.

Janet Buck summarized the concerns that the Planning Board would pass onto the Zoning Board. She said that backing out onto the street was not unusual in Watertown, especially East Watertown where she lived. However, the safety of pedestrians when backing out onto

the street where there was no, or very little sidewalk was a concern to be shared with the Zoning Board. Other matters discussed included the removal of trees, although this was not addressed in the Zoning Code, the appropriateness of the sidewalk for pedestrians, and the need for a written DPW approval of the stormwater review. Staff confirmed that an initial review had been completed by DPW.

Both Abigail Hammett and Rachael Sack agreed that it was important to balance the equation with recognizing the value of adding to the inventory of much-needed housing that the project would bring to this part of the city.

Abigail Hammett suggested considering reconfiguration of the interior space to reduce the overhang. She also suggested that reducing the overhang and eliminating the sidewalk to add more plantings would be more in line with the entrances of buildings across the street. Chair Buck said that while there were concerns over the proposed project, they did not represent grounds for recommending that the special permit be denied. The members informally agreed that they would identify their major concerns in the Planning Board report and the need for housing in Watertown Square but make no overall recommendation.

Two separate motions were made for each of the addresses.

Payson Whitney made a motion for 6 Church Hill St that the Planning Board express the following:

- 1) Concern for pedestrian safety with traffic backing onto the street
- 2) Concern for the extent of the tree removal on the site (many/all mature trees)
- 3) Concern for the appropriateness of the proposed sidewalk –to reduce risks, consider elimination of that sidewalk along its frontage and replacement with plantings where appropriate
- 4) Interest in obtaining confirmation from DPW that the project can meet stormwater requirements
- 5) Interest in reducing the overhang with possible reconfiguration of the interior space to accommodate that.
- 6) Support for additional housing, given that it was better than a no-action alternative
- 7) Consideration of whether the new Watertown Square Zoning would yield other (better) opportunities.

The motion was seconded by Abigail Hammett and approved unanimously 4-0 with Janet Buck, Payson Whitney, Abigail Hammett, and Rachael Sack voting in favor.

Payson Whitney made the same motion for 12 Church Hill St, seconded by Rachael Sack and approved unanimously 4-0 with Janet Buck, Payson Whitney, Abigail Hammett, and Rachael Sack voting in favor.

446, 458, 500, and 550 Arsenal St_ Watertown Mall Transformation Project Phase 1

A disclosure statement was made by Payson Whitney. He stated that he lived across the street from this location. Under the state ethics laws, he had a financial interest in it. This had been disclosed to the City and based on their determination, he was allowed to participate in this hearing.

Michele Lower, Vice President of Real Estate Development and Community Relations, at Alexandria Real Estate Equities, introduced the team members and gave a brief overview of the project. She said that the team consisted of the same members that were part of the Master Plan approved in November 2023. There were no major changes in the plans, just refinements.

This Phase, the largest of the 5 phases would include 3 acres of publicly accessible open space, undergrounding of utilities, 373 new trees and have LEED Gold certification and goal to transition to all electric buildings. The petitioners had worked closely with the city and the community in this project, having had more than 9 public meetings.

Following the conclusion of her presentation which included photos of the master plan as well as existing conditions, she invited Stephanie Hsia from Reed Hilderbrand to go over site design. There were some refinements to the Master Plan, including advancements of the planting palette, adjustment of grading around the wetlands to minimize disturbance, saving of some more existing trees, adjustment of the location of the bus shelter to make it more visible and widening of the north-south shared use path from 8 ft to 10 feet.

Also described by Stephanie Hsia were the three landscape typologies for the site—the Paseo, Plaza, and Park, including both existing and proposed conditions. The feature garden would take inspiration from the paintings of renowned Armenian American artist, Arshile Gorky, who spent some years of his life in Watertown. They were also planning to incorporate public art.

Describing the site accessibility to building entries, she said that there were drop-off zones close to the entries and several ADA-accessible parking spots.

Rich Hollworth, VHB, gave a brief overview of the site circulation patterns, parking plan, and fire access plan. He stated that no changes had been made since the previous proposal, just refinements of the design, complementing the refinements of the buildings,

to make sure that these are lined up with the recently implemented improvements on Arsenal Street. He highlighted the new connections that would be enhanced because of this

project. Grading and drainage plans were also highlighted in the presentation. Measures would be taken to protect the site during construction. Post construction effort would focus on enhancing the overall water quality.

Payson Whitney asked if the new paving on Arsenal Street would be disturbed during construction. Staff confirmed that the changes would be minimized and restored. Rich Hollworth valued the comment and hoped to investigate it in more detail.

Cathy Bell, NBBJ, discussed the two Office/Lab buildings, OL2 and OL3, stating that the designs were consistent with the approved Master Plan Special Permit and the Watertown Design Guidelines. Design details were presented, including material palette, massing, heights, and setbacks. Views were displayed, including views from Arsenal St, and aerial views.

Kyle Coburn, Howeler + Yoon Architects, detailed the Amenity building A2, presenting the site plan, materiality, and perspectives from Arsenal St and the courtyard.

Cathy Bell provided an overview of the resiliency and sustainability measures within the project, including EV parking, enhanced stormwater management system and bioretention areas.

Following the conclusion of presentations by the team, Janet Buck opened the floor to public comments.

Libby Shaw, 73 Templeton Parkway, also representing Trees for Watertown, expressed appreciation to ARE for their support in “greening this part of Watertown.” She complimented their work for the city of Cambridge and valued their commitment to the long-term health and protection of trees on the site.

Staff acknowledged receipt of the email received earlier that day, signed by 3 individuals, requesting the Mall Project be put on hold till completion of the MEPA process. After confirming that there were no hands raised for additional comments on Zoom, Janet Buck closed the public hearing and opened discussion to the Board. Staff stated that they recommended approval of the Site Plan Review. They felt that the petitioners had submitted a phased approach in keeping with what was approved through the Site Plan Review Process. Staff would be happy to answer any related questions.

Staff announced that the new alternate, Sarah Scott, would be voting on this petition in the absence of Jason Cohen.

Rachael Sack asked questions about traffic and parking tied to A2. Given that the building was for public use, she asked for more details on handicapped parking and accessibility. Rich Hollworth, VHB, explained that there was an accessible drop-off area. Explaining the rationale for prohibiting vehicular connections across the City of Cambridge Aqueduct, he said that besides the dedicated drop-off area, additional parking behind the Mall could be used to access A2.

Abigail Hammett expressed her appreciation for the detailed presentation, noting that they had addressed many concerns brought up at the Community Meeting, especially the incorporation of views without trees in their presentation. She expressed concern that the A2 building seemed more an amenity than a retail building. Given that this was the first phase of a more mixed-use project where the other mix of uses were part of later phases, she stated that this building should be programmed to be more retail than amenity.

Michele Lower acknowledged that that was a “fair comment” and attributed this to the fact that to date they had no tenants and did not know how the building would be used. She said that the intent was retail, and the architecture was designed to draw the public. The building was planned to have a full commercial kitchen to serve both tenants and the public.

Abigail Hammett appreciated the building’s architecture, describing it as a signature piece. However, she noted that A2 faced the Office/Lab buildings and did not have an entrance from Arsenal Street, giving the impression that it primarily served them versus the public-- The public would need to go around to find the entrance. The team was asked to consider putting an additional door facing the street to make the public feel more welcome.

Sarah Scott supported the idea of adding a visible pedestrian entrance from Arsenal Street, emphasizing the importance of making the building inviting and accessible. She suggested placing an entrance on the southwest corner for easy access, particularly for those arriving by bus. She proposed reevaluating the placement of the blank service wall. Commending the project’s public amenities, she stressed the need for design elements that clearly welcomed the public to use the spaces.

Abigail Hammett continued with other architectural comments related to OL3 and OL2. While she appreciated the “minimalism” and “simplicity” of the buildings, she stated that the facades needed more punctuation and the entries to the buildings provided

opportunity for that. She also suggested making the back entry to OL3 stronger as it would be used more till other phases were completed.

Echoing her comments, Payson Whitney noted that the architecturally interesting features of OL3 did not face Arsenal Street. It seemed like a “very massive white building”, and he had hoped to see some step-backs, especially with a 25-foot penthouse. Based on his calculations, it would be the tallest building on Arsenal Street and could benefit from improvements to the façade, particularly some step-backs or a curved edge on the corner. In response to his question about the length of the “temporary parking,” Michele Lower was unable to give a definite answer, saying that the development was driven by the market, and they did not have a client at this time. She could not give a start date for the project and said that a great deal of infrastructure work needed to be completed prior to its start.

Janet Buck suggested setting back the top level to make a difference in the overall massing. She thanked them for the detailed presentation and expressed her excitement for the project. Noting the development on the campus across the street, she asked if they were planning to integrate public art and markers about history on this site as well. Michele Lower said that there would be an integrated process for this with the community and she looked forward to it.

Staff noted the condition that would address public art, stating that there would be no formal approval as it was private property, although the input of various committees would be part of the process. Stephanie Hsia listed the locations identified for public art. It was confirmed that the building facades would not have murals on them.

Based on the Board’s concerns, staff clarified that public art would not have a branding component.

In response to Sarah Scott’s concerns about the location of the bike parking, Stephanie Hsia said she was open to discussing this further. Staff provided input on this, hoping that the team would support flexibility in their consideration including looking at the context and other bike stand locations in the vicinity.

Staff clarified that this was a Site Plan Review, a by-right process. Once completed this Phase will be ready for a Building Permit.

Payson Whitney suggested that based on comments received on the building architecture, the applicants consider seeking a continuance for the petition. Sarah Baker asked if the applicants could work with staff to consider an alternative location for the Blue Bike Station.

Attorney Bill York agreed to continue the hearing to next month's agenda. Payson Whitney made a motion to continue the petition to November 13. The motion was seconded by Abigail Hammett and approved unanimously (5-0), with Janet Buck, Payson Whitney, Abigail Hammett, Sarah Scott and Rachael Sack voting in favor.

1 Rosary Dr.

Attorney Ken Leitner, representing the petitioner, Stephen Corbett detailed the history of the site. He described the site characteristics stating that the Rosary Academy consisted of three attached buildings, two of which were still standing, a 25-unit affordable housing project, and a convent, 1 Rosary Drive, Unit 61. The former high school on this site had been converted into 11 residential buildings containing 59 units. Together, there were 13 buildings on a site of about 8.1 acres. The building under discussion was constructed in about 1964 for the nuns and remained in use until 2020. The petitioner's father, a local attorney, had received a special permit for the 59 units then located in the T-Zone. In addition, they had filed for a use variance that resulted in the current 25-unit affordable housing project and daycare on the first floor. When the zoning classification of this property was changed after 1987, from T-Zone to Cluster Residential, all ratios became non-conforming. Any attempt to improve the site now would result in a variance. For more than a year, the petitioner had wrestled with staff to find an appropriate use for unit 61 or 1 Rosary Drive. The property had been on the market since 2020. The petitioner planned to construct the three new buildings within the existing footprint. They had met with the owners and trustees to keep them informed.

Commenting on the Staff Report which recommended denial of the petition as all the ratios were non-conforming, Attorney Leitner said that the proposed project would reduce the extent of the non-conformities, having less lot coverage, more open space, and greater setbacks than the existing. There was also a decrease in lot area per dwelling.

Attorney Leitner provided a rationale for the relief sought, stating that it was part of a residential community, part of a special permit, and a variance. He said that it satisfied the criteria for a variance, given the topography, unique structure, and limited parking. It was a financial hardship given that it had been on the market since 2020. He said that the project

met the criteria for the special permit as well. The petitioners had also filed relief as a special permit finding if considered as part of a single lot.

Concluding his presentation, Attorney Leitner introduced other members of the team and described the fire access plans that were in the process of being finalized. He also stated that the project was well supported by the community. Ron Bourque, project architect, detailed the project plans. Civil engineer Fergal Brennock went over the site plans stating that there would be no change in topography, minimal impact on services and removal of only one tree.

Following the conclusion of the presentations, Janet Buck opened the meeting to comments from the public.

Geri Blitzman, 2C Locust Lane, original owner for 36 years, found it upsetting to have the property abandoned for 4 years and felt the need to resolve this expeditiously. The property had multi-uses and parking was challenging. She said that the community living there was in favor of the proposed project. This was evident in the number of individuals who had come to this meeting.

Toby Reed said she had lived on Angela Lane since 2016. She had been a trustee for 3 years. Parking had been a challenge on this site and residents had noted other people illegally parking in their spots. They liked the proposed plans because it would not exacerbate the parking issues, given that all five units had a garage with one space, and 1-2 additional spaces next to their unit. The building designs were compatible with the other townhouses and the landscape plans would increase the open space. If not developed the vacant building would be a concern. Based on the presentation by Ken Leitner, she wondered about the options available for the building. It seemed that no building could meet the current Zoning. Also, any reuse would worsen the parking situation. She said that 32% of Siena Village was low-income housing and they all got along well. Their concerns were primarily about traffic and parking, and they hoped that they would continue to be the community they were.

Catherine Cote, 32 Angela Lane, and original owner said that this was a very special place. The building under discussion was not very attractive, had deteriorated over time, creating some urgency for the sale and redevelopment of the site. It would give them more open space and not worsen the parking concerns.

Angelo Defrancesco, 4 Locus Lane, was a resident since 2006 and a trustee since 2007. He considered this “the first viable project in the last 5 years.” He said that it conformed with the spirit of a Cluster Residential district, had a favorable ratio of green space to building

space, would provide much needed housing in the city, and had unanimous public support from the people most impacted by the outcome. He appreciated the developer's willingness to listen to feedback, and adapt to suggestions, further giving them confidence in the project.

Janet Buck closed the public hearing after confirming that there were no more hands raised on Zoom.

Steve Corbett, 14 Irving Park, petitioner made some closing remarks. He said he was disappointed by the Planning Board's recommendation to deny the petition. So far, his proposed plans have been embraced by the neighborhood, and were consistent with the City's goals. It would contribute to the tax base. He said that this was a unique lot containing over 8 acres of land, a perimeter of more than half a mile and a grade elevation that varied more than 28 feet. All the buildings on this lot were governed by a master deed that required a super majority vote to modify. The convent was the last piece in the redevelopment of the former Rosary Academy. He discussed the zoning history of the city as it was rezoned from the T Zone to Cluster Residential rendering it non-compliant with respect to density, setbacks, lot and impervious coverage and open space and making redevelopment of the convent impossible without zoning relief. The overwhelming support of the community to redevelop the site based on the proposed plans was unique, as this was rarely seen in most development proposals. He concluded his presentation by providing the rationale for granting the relief requested.

Janet Buck clarified that the Zoning Board of Appeals was the permit-granting authority for this petition and the Planning Board would make a recommendation.

Janet Buck said that this was a difficult situation. She felt that the use was appropriate and had the support of the neighbors. Any attempt to demolish the building or reuse it would exacerbate the parking issues on the site. She felt that there was "good reason to grant" what they were asking for and invited other members to deliberate.

Staff summarized the Staff Report stating the expectations from the Planning Board. It was hoped that the Board would discuss the permissible ways to permit the project and whether the variance standards were met by the petitioner. Staff also corrected the statement made by the Petitioners counsel that there were no offers for the property. It was more accurate to say that the offer(s) made had not met the expectations of the community.

Based on Sarah Scott's suggestion to rezone this area, staff said that it was the Planning Board and/or City Council that could institute that change, not the Zoning Board. Staff

confirmed that the Planning Board could move forward with a Zoning Amendment. Community or property owners could request that as well. After discussing possible zoning options staff agreed that the only zone that could meet the intent of what is there today was R.75.

Payson Whitney listed the boxes the project checked—it would provide much-needed housing and be compatible with the character of the community. However, “process was getting in the way of substance.”

The Board suggested that the petitioner could instigate a zoning change for the parcel, which might be favorable as it was zoned contiguous to R.075

Rachael Sack suggested providing more information and analysis to meet the standards for a variance. A lot of what was discussed verbally this evening had not been incorporated in the application and it would be to the benefit of the petitioner to provide a better case for meeting the variance standards.

Also needed was a letter of approval for the redevelopment from the trustees.

Janet Buck suggested how the standards for the variance could be applied and strengthened in the case of this petition. Reuse of this property would be a substantial hardship as it would increase the parking problems. The building had a religious use with limited parking which would not be a feasible situation to reproduce. Also, the sisters were waiting for the proceeds from the sale of this property. Payson Whitney also suggested making clear the nature of the permit requested (whether special permit, special permit finding etc.)

Abigail Hammett also suggested that seeking the zoning change with support from the Condo Board would strengthen their case before the ZBA more so than if it were sponsored by the petitioner on their own. Payson Whitney said that letters of support from the trustees along with comment letters from the residents would be additionally helpful.

Members discussed the wording of the motion, with Sarah Scott providing the final language as follows: 1) the proposed project is a good use of the site; 2) the current application does not sufficiently make the argument for the proposal 3) based on the public hearing testimony, the Planning Board is of the opinion that should the application be strengthened and revised, that there could be a favorable outcome for the immediate neighborhood and community at large and 4) if the Petitioner is unable to provide such a basis, the Petitioner should consider seeking a rezoning of the property to R.75. The motion

Watertown Planning Board
October 9, 2024
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was seconded by Payson Whitney and passed unanimously (5-0), with Janet Buck, Payson Whitney, Abigail Hammett, Sarah Scott and Rachael Sack voting in favor.

The motion to adjourn was made by Payson Whitney seconded by Janet Buck (5-0).

MEETING ADJOURNED: 11:13 PM

MINUTES APPROVED: _____

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: October 30, 2024 | PLACE: City Council Chamber | TIME: 6:00 PM | COMMENCED: 6:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

PRESENT: Janet Buck, Chair; Abigail Hammett; Rachael Sack; Payson Whitney; Sarah Scott; Jason Cohen; Steven Magoon, Assistant City Manager for Community Development and Planning; Gideon Schreiber, Director of Planning & Zoning; Erika Jerram, Director of Community Design; Larry Field, Senior Planner; Matthew Neubacher, Planner

CONTINUATION OF PUBLIC HEARING

Chair Buck begins the continuation of the public hearing to review the proposed Watertown Square amendments to the zoning ordinance.

Continuation of Discussion of Zoning Text

Steven Magoon presents the *DCCDP UPDATES TO WSQ ZONING PACKAGE* document, reviewing each item in the document in order.

Regarding the first item, on the definition of Household, Member Sack reiterates the point made by Councilor Feltner at the joint meeting on 10/29/2024 concerning the scope of the term “housekeeping” in the proposed definition. She asks if more specific terminology should be used.

Regarding the fifth item, on including language regarding Universal Design, Member Whitney asks for clarification on what Universal Design means. Mr. Magoon explains it is a broad term used to describe good design.

Regarding the seventh item, on ground floor height, Member Cohen asks why there was a height limit to begin with. Mr. Magoon explains that the original height limit was a suggestion by a consultant.

Regarding the eighth and ninth items, on Flat Roof Stories and Step Backs, Mr. Schreiber acknowledged that the intent of these changes is to preserve historic facades and work with narrow streets where there are currently no sidewalks. Member Whitney asks if this text could define the types of lots or facades this applies to. Member Hammett follows and asks if these concerns can be addressed in site plan review.

Regarding the tenth item, on open space contributions in-lieu, Chair Buck asks whether the language should include language to the effect of, “...where it’s not possible to add open space.” Member Hammett confirmed with staff that a developer cannot give a piece of land as a contribution in-lieu that is not good for open space. Member Whitney asks who “The City” refers to in the proposed text. Mr. Magoon clarifies that the term is intentionally ambiguous to allow both Staff and the Planning Board to weigh in during Site Plan Review and Special Permits. Member Cohen asks if the proposed text removes financial contributions as valid contributions in-lieu. Mr. Magoon clarifies that a payment can be a contribution as intended in the text. Members Cohen, Sack, Whitney, and Chair Buck agree that the proposed text should specify “financial contributions” as an option for contributions in-lieu.

Regarding the eleventh item, on the definition of Open Space, member Hammett suggests adding balconies to the definition of Open Space. Member Whitney says that the Open Space requirements should reference both the definition of open space and the proposed text, to make sure they tie together properly. Chair Buck concurs. Member Hammett confirms with staff that the proposed text is a clarification of requirements and is not changing what is allowed, and Member Cohen confirms with staff that the Open Space requirements are set up such that a property may have (for example) 100% building coverage and 50% open space.

Regarding the twelfth item, on façade articulation, Chair Buck suggests replacing the word “may” with the word “shall” to read: “Buildings shall be required to...”. Mr. Magoon notes that the proposed text adds specificity to requirements expressed elsewhere regarding facades and fenestrations. Member Cohen asks if the proposed text is overly subjective and impossible to enforce. Mr. Magoon states the ambiguity is intentional, and Mr. Schreiber says the text allows room for incorporating the Watertown Design Guidelines. Chair Buck revises her point and suggests that stronger language should be used to articulate façade requirements. Mr. Schreiber suggests using the word “Will” to strengthen the language.

Regarding the thirteenth item, on unbundled parking, Member Cohen asks about the use of the word “encouraged” in the proposed text and comments that “‘encouraged’ has no teeth” for enforcement. Mr. Magoon notes that parking requirements will be different for commercial and residential projects. Member Whitney notes that the Board can use unbundling as a condition of approval for projects, and Mr. Schreiber confirms there is precedent for this. Member Scott requests adding unbundled parking to the list of subjects for further study, to review how it strategically ties into Transportation Demand Management (TDM) policies and TDM review, as well as impacts of removing overnight parking bans in the winter and how the city manages its public spaces overall.

Regarding the fourteenth item, on screening garages, member Cohen asks how screening is enforceable. Mr. Schreiber responds that the Planning Board can require this during review, and Mr. Magoon states it is important not to be overly prescriptive in writing code. Member Hammett notes that this provision gives the Planning Board a reason to bring up screening of garages and related façade considerations. Member Whitney clarifies with staff that the term “residence districts” refers to residential zoning districts.

Regarding the eighteenth item, on LEED requirements, member Scott notes that recent litigation contends that imposing LEED requirements preempts the Building Code and is not allowed per the Massachusetts Attorney General. She suggests that sites can be required to be LEED “certifiable” but not “certified”.

Regarding the zoning map changes to Arsenal St, member Scott questions whether to increase the density of the brick apartments on the south side of Arsenal St to WSQ3 zoning. Mr. Magoon notes that these properties would not meet the WSQ3 requirements.

Regarding the zoning map changes to Winter St, Mr. Magoon notes that the proposed changes will make one apartment building nonconforming.

Regarding the zoning map changes to Galen St, member Sack questions if there will be impacts on the west side of Galen from upzoning the east side properties. Members Whitney and Hammett

comment that the proposed upzoning will create a good transition from the residential lots on the south to the density of Watertown Square. Member Cohen says that it is good these lots are being upzoned because it gives incentive for them to be redeveloped.

Regarding the zoning map changes to Riverside St, member Scott notes that there exists an “inventoried historic district” – a concentration of historic buildings, as recognized by the Commonwealth – and suggests that the NMU zoning should be consistent across this neighborhood. Member Hammett notes that what is allowed in the NMU is nearly the same as what is allowed in the T zone. Chair Buck and Member Cohen ask if this is an example of spot zoning at someone’s request. Member Whitney asks if zoning these lots as NMU is meant to attract people and businesses, that rezoning gives incentive for redevelopment; Mr. Schreiber notes that the NMU allows residential-only properties. Member Hammett asks if these lots will be impacted by the changing street configuration of the Watertown Square Area plan, staff confirm it will not. Member Whitney says it makes sense for the proposed lots to be included in the NMU district, but also asks if the entire NMU area should actually be T 2-family. Mr. Schreiber notes that the existing structures all resemble NMU. Member Cohen asks if the Board should consider the motivations of the requestor. Member Whitney confirms with staff that the proposed lots are in common ownership. Chair Buck states that the Board can assume the owner has potential development plans or aspirations, and supports rezoning the two parcels as proposed.

Regarding the zoning map change to the Main St Delta, member Hammett asks if this use precludes any commercial uses on the delta, e.g., kiosks or activating retail. Mr. Magoon says it will not prohibit such uses.

Public Comment

Discussion concluded and the floor was opened to public comment. No members of the public presented comments. Member Sack stated she received letters regarding affordable housing and asked Mr. Magoon to reiterate the staff’s plan to move forward. Mr. Magoon reiterates the staff’s commitment to investigate the efficacy of various affordable housing incentives. As an issue that has received high levels of attention from several members of the Planning Board, City Council, and members of the public, staff will ensure that affordable housing receives constant attention moving forward.

Mr. Magoon asks the Chair to move forward with discussion and voting on the proposed zoning text and its amendments as presented during the hearing.

Discussion Summary

Chair Buck summarizes the previous discussion for consideration by the Board, as follows:

- Items 1-8 and 13-17 were all supported as presented.
- Regarding item 9, the Board recommended adding exceptions to the 12’ sidewalk width requirement. Member Whitney suggested language for this provision: “except where detrimental or not feasible”.
- Regarding item 10, the Board recommended adding “financial contributions” as valid contributions in-lieu for open space.

- Regarding item 11, the Board recommended tying in the Open Space requirements to the definition of open space.
- Regarding item 12, the Board recommended including the word “will” rather than “may” to strengthen the language on façade articulation requirements.
- Items 13-18 were all supported as presented.

Board Vote on Proposed Text

Payson Whitney motions that the Planning Board recommend the proposed zoning code with DCDP updates and changes as discussed during the public hearing to the City Council for consideration.

The motion was seconded by Jason Cohen and passed unanimously (6-0), with Janet Buck, Payson Whitney, Abigail Hammett, Sarah Scott, Jason Cohen, and Rachael Sack voting in favor.

Board Vote on Proposed Map

Payson Whitney motions that the Planning Board recommend the proposed zoning map with DCDP updates and changes as discussed during the public hearing to the City Council for consideration.

The motion was seconded by Abigail Hammett and passed unanimously (6-0), with Janet Buck, Payson Whitney, Abigail Hammett, Sarah Scott and Rachael Sack voting in favor.

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The motion to adjourn was made by Janet Buck seconded by Jason Cohen (6-0). Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 7:51 pm.

BRODER

November 6, 2024

Planning Board
City of Watertown
Attn: Janet Buck
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472

RE: 275 & 313 Pleasant Street, 80 Rosedale Road, 60 Acton Street | Special Permit Extension | PB-2023-04 SP/SR

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

On behalf of Broder Pleasant LLC, I am writing to request an extension of Special Permit #PB-2023-04 issued on January 24, 2024, with Certificate of Grant dated February 13, 2024, and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds in Book 82538, Page 81 on March 4, 2024 (the "Special Permit").

Despite our best efforts, we have been forced to temporarily delay the advancement of this project due to unfavorable market conditions. The combination of elevated interest rates, a substantial increase in the cost of construction, and funding challenges faced by life sciences companies resulting in reduced tenant demand, has caused the construction and associated financing of new lab buildings to be economically unfeasible at this time.

Considering these headwinds, we are requesting a "good cause" two-year extension of the Special Permit under the Watertown Zoning Ordinance §9.13. We remain confident in the long-term viability of this project and of Watertown's positioning as an attractive location for tenants within the life sciences industry.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to commencing construction at the earliest possible opportunity. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,



Kai Vernstrom
Director of Acquisitions at Broder (on behalf of Broder Pleasant LLC)

cc: Steve Magoon, Assistant City Manager for Community Development and Planning
Gideon Schreiber, Assistant Director of Planning
Ingrid Marchesano, Head Clerk/Planning Board Clerk
Sameena Pirani, Zoning Clerk



CITY OF WATERTOWN

Department of
Community Development and
Planning
Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617 972 6417
Fax: 617 972 6484
www.watertown-ma.gov

To: Planning Board
From: Department of Community Development & Planning
Date: November 8, 2024
Re: Willow Park redevelopment project

The Planning Board agenda for November 13, 2024 includes the Willow Park redevelopment project.

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/Browse.aspx?id=90844&repo=r-5ece5628>

This project has filed an application to the Commonwealth on its eligibility to use the Chapter 40B permitting process. This “project eligibility” application includes an opportunity for “local comment.” The Commonwealth’s Handbook on Chapter 40B specifically identifies a role for the Planning Board at the project eligibility phase:

... the Planning Board should be asked to weigh in on the project’s relationship to the city or town master plan if the plan is current and actively being implemented.

The deadline for providing local comments to the Commonwealth is November 22, 2024. Below is further information about the project, Chapter 40B, and project materials that can be reviewed before the meeting.

Willow Park redevelopment project

The Watertown Housing Authority and Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) propose to redevelop the existing Willow Park public housing development. The new development would consist of 138 units: 60 public housing units (a one-for-one replacement of the existing units) and 78 additional deed-restricted affordable units.

Chapter 40B Project Eligibility

Under Chapter 40B, the process for permitting projects differs from the usual Chapter 40A process. The first step in the process is a determination by a state subsidizing agency (here, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities or EOHLC) that a project is

“eligible” to use the Chapter 40B process. The agency’s determination process includes a 30-day comment period for municipal entities, including departments, boards, commissions and committees, and for the general public. **The 30-day comment period began on October 23, 2024 and will conclude on November 22, 2024.**

EOHLC’s Handbook on Chapter 40B advises those who comment “to focus on matters that clearly fall within the scope of a PE [project eligibility] determination.” In addition, as previously noted, the Handbook suggests that the Planning Board comment on “the project’s relationship to the city or town master plan.”

The Project Eligibility process requires the state agency to make a determination if:

- the proposed project appears generally eligible under the requirements of the housing subsidy program;
- the site of the proposed project is generally appropriate for residential development, taking into consideration information provided by the municipality or other parties regarding municipal actions previously taken to meet affordable housing needs, such as inclusionary zoning, multifamily districts adopted under M.G.L. c.40A, and overlay districts adopted under M.G.L. c.40R, (such finding, with supporting reasoning, to be set forth in reasonable detail);
- the conceptual project design is generally appropriate for the site on which it is located, taking into consideration factors that may include proposed use, conceptual site plan and building massing, topography, environmental resources, and integration into existing development patterns (such finding, with supporting reasoning, to be set forth in reasonable detail);
- the proposed project appears financially feasible within the housing market in which it will be situated (based on comparable rentals or sales figures);
- an initial pro forma has been reviewed, including a land valuation determination consistent with [EOHLC]’s guidelines, and the project appears financially feasible and consistent with [EOHLC]’s guidelines for Cost Examination and Limitations on Profits and Distributions (if applicable) on the basis of estimated development costs;
- the applicant is a public agency, a non-profit organization, or a limited dividend organization, and it meets the general eligibility standards of the housing program; and
- the applicant controls the site, based on evidence that the applicant or a related entity owns the site, or holds an option or contract to acquire such interest in the site, or

has such other interest in the site as is deemed by the subsidizing agency to be sufficient to control the site.

As with Planning Board reports to the ZBA or City Council, staff will draft and submit any comments the Board wishes to provide EOHLC.

Chapter 40B Consolidated Permit Process

If EOHLC issues a project eligibility letter, POAH/WHA will file an application for a Chapter 40B permit to allow the project. Chapter 40B is a “consolidated permit” process where the Zoning Board of Appeals is the permit-granting authority. This process does not include a separate public hearing before the Planning Board and a required Planning Board recommendation. However, like other boards and commissions, Chapter 40B provides an opportunity for the Planning Board to provide comments to the ZBA if it wishes.

Given the likely timing of a Willow Park application, the Planning Board will be able to decide at its December or January meeting whether to provide comments to the ZBA.

Additional Information on the Willow Park redevelopment project

There is an online folder for the Willow Park project that includes separate tabs for the Chapter 40B project eligibility application and for the Developer’s Conference that is also occurring this month. POAH/WHA have begun the first step in the City’s permitting process: a pre-application submission of a Site Plan Review package for the Developer’s Conference on November 20, 2024. This package is significantly more detailed than the project eligibility materials. Review of this material is not required for Planning Board members to decide on comments to EOHLC.

The link for these materials is below:

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/Browse.aspx?id=90844&repo=r-5ece5628>