

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: November 13, 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; Sarah Scott - Alternate
Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber, Planning Director; Larry Field, Planner

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of 9/11/2024 meeting.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of 10/9/2024 meeting.

Rachael Sack seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of 10/30/2024 meeting.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

CASES PENDING

313 Pleasant Street

Janet Buck, the Planning Board received a request for 2 year extension for the above Special Permit/Site Plan Review petition # PB-2023-04 that was granted on January 10, 2024.

Jason Cohen, I thought that we allowed 1 year extension only ?

Gideon Schreiber, the petitioner is allowed to request 2 year extension, standard practice is 3 year time frame for expiration. Larger scale projects take beyond 1 year, they will be asking for other extensions in the future.

Kai Vernstrom, on behalf of Broder LLC, these projects take lots of time, we are unable to begin construction at this time.

Payson Whitney motioned that the Planning Board grant the 2 year extension request for the above petition.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

Willow Park

Janet Buck, Chapter 40B Project Eligibility Application has been submitted to Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. This is an opportunity for the Planning Board to comment.

Larry Field, this is a public housing project, This is a proposal to replace existing 60 Units, add 78 new units, 111 parking spaces and a large open space area. Half of the site will be open space. Developers are seeking to use Chapter 40B development process. They first applied to the State, received an application letter on October 23, now there is a 30 day period for comments. Is the proposed project consistent with the existing Comprehensive Plan ? Staff recommend that the Planning Board comments on this project which is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Location is important, more housing will be provided, primarily multi family and cluster residential area. Planning Board does not have to make the final decision tonight. Developer will file the application with the City, ZBA will proceed, this is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Abigail Hammett, do the Planning Board comments have any weight?

Larry Field, the Board comments would be very helpful. Two community meetings were held in person, pre-development developer conference regarding funding, etc. is scheduled for November 20.

Payson Whitney, the 30-day comment period starts on November 22, first quarter of 2025 the project will go to ZBA.

Janet Buck, I have attended the meetings and was favorable impressed. We hope to see more in the future. This is a very convenient location.

Jason Cohen, it is hard to dispute, the site has housing already, I am in support. This site needs to remain as affordable housing.

Rachael Sack, developer responds to comments received for residents.

Abigail Hammett, I am in support of the project. More affordable units will be added and additional open space provided. This will be real benefit to the City. This project will meet the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Sarah Scott, providing additional affordable units will be beneficial.

Jason Cohen motioned that the Planning Board requests the staff to submit a letter of support on behalf of the Board.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In favor

446, 458, 500 & 550 Arsenal Street – continued from 10/9/24

Michele Lower, Alexandria, we have made some significant changes in direct response to comments at the last meeting.

Stephanie , the proposed design is welcoming, we are proposing 48 bike parking spots. Comments at the last meeting asked for more blue bike stations, which will be provided. We are proposing movable outdoor furniture and lush plantings.

Rick, VHB, this is an opportunity to add convenient parking. Lines have been widened and extended.

Cathy Bell, materials used on the site are submitted tonight, details of the entry, warm colors used, deeper red terracotta, textures and patterns used. Glass lobby, multiple steps added at the south façade, 43' away from the Arsenal Street. We have worked hard to address the Planning Board comments. Different patterns and accent terracotta used at the main entrance, wood visible through the glass was used on the inside. Different materials will be used at the loading dock.

Gideon Schreiber, the project received Special Permit Master plan approval for the first phase. Public hearing was continued at the last meeting.

Janet Buck, the public hearing is now closed, and we will have comments from the Planning Board members.

Payson Whitney, increase of setbacks, colors and textures will help. We should always view the materials as part of the process.

Abigail Hammett, we appreciate the changes. The addition of wood will be helpful. The entire project looks very stark/serious, little more joy could be injected. It now looks as a federal/government. Outdoor site furnishings should be more whimsical.

Rachael Sack, thank you for the new changes making the development much better.

Janet Buck, very impressed with the design but the awning along the walkway does not make sense. Is there something that could make it more interesting? It could be changed into a feature, maybe trellis. None of our comments should stop us from voting tonight.

Gideon Schreiber, flexibility will allow for changes, minor modifications will happen. They can be submitted for staff approval before the building permit is issued.

Janet Buck, interior changes are up to them, awning is different.

Bill York, Atty, language can be included regarding change of the awning, furniture. The developer will work with the staff.

Payson Whitney motioned that Conditional Approval of the requested Master Plan Phase 1 plans be granted based on the finding that this Phase is in accordance with Watertown Zoning Ordinance Section 5.18 and Master Plan Special Permit granted November 8, 2023 with the conditions set forth in the staff report and a new condition substantially as follows: Petitioners to consider (a) design changes to the awning/wall between OL2 and OL3, including a trellis and (b) varied and interesting site furnishings.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 Alternate member Scott voted for Jason Cohen

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 8:10 pm.