



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
Alexander Dale, Member
Sarah Baker, Member
Gregory Girard, Alternate
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MINUTES

On Wednesday evening, November 20, 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.

Members in attendance (In-person): Melissa SantucciRozzi, *Chair*; Sarah Baker, *Member*; David Ferris, *Member*;

Members in attendance (Remote): Alexander Dale, *Member*; Samuel Odamah, *Alternate*;

Members Absent: Christopher Heep, *Member*; Gregory Girard, *Alternate*;

Staff present (in-person): Gideon Schreiber, *Director of Planning and Zoning*; Sameena Pirani, *Administrative Specialist*; Antonio Mancini, *Zoning Enforcement Officer*.

Chair SantucciRozzi opened the meeting stating that all votes would be via recall as some members were remote. She introduced staff, reviewed the agenda and noted the members in attendance via roll call.

Motion to approve September 25, 2024, meeting minutes was made by Member Ferris and seconded by Member Odamah. The motion was approved by roll call vote 4-0 with Chair SantucciRozzi, Dale, Ferris and Odamah voting in favor.

Motion to approve October 23, 2024, meeting minutes was made by Member Baker and seconded by Member Odamah. The motion was approved by roll call vote 4-0 with Chair SantucciRozzi, Baker, Dale and Odamah voting in favor.

Cases: 6 & 12 Church Hill St

At the Chair's request, the motion to continue the petition to the ZBA's January 22, 2025 meeting was made by Member Ferris, seconded by Member Baker. The motion was approved by roll call vote 5-0

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.

with Members Dale, Baker, Ferris, Odamah and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor. Attorney Leitner confirmed that an extension agreement had been signed.

1 Rosary Dr

Attorney Leitner, representing the petitioner Stephen Corbett, introduced the team. He detailed the historical context of the site, including the relevant permitting history. The overall development consisted of 59 townhouses, approved by overlapping petitions for a variance and a special permit around 1987, a housing project with 25 deed-restricted affordable units and a daycare facility, and a convent (Unit 61) consisting of about 45 dormitory style units. The latter had been abandoned and on the market since 2020. In 1987, with the change in the zoning classification for this parcel from T-Zone to Cluster Residential (CR), 11 out of the 13 buildings on site became non-conforming.

Attorney Leitner also detailed the forms of relief for the Board to consider. To redevelop 1 Rosary Drive with a total of 5 units, the petitioner had requested relief as an amendment to the 1987 Special Permit and a Special Permit Finding (considering the site as a whole, given that the apartment building on site was to remain). Explaining the scope of the project, Attorney Leitner said that the redevelopment would be within the same footprint and the setbacks would be greater than the present building, allowing for on-site parking. He said that under the Special Permit analysis the project would be an improvement to the property.

In the alternative, the petitioner had requested relief under multiple variances. Attorney Leitner explained that the only permitted use in the CR district was residential, and the convent was not counted as a unit because of the exempt Dover use. Therefore, a variance would be needed for any additional residential units, the lot area per dwelling unit ratio being one of other requirements. He believed that the project met the four conditions for a variance given its unique topography, limited parking, limited use in the CR district. The less intensive use proposed did not derogate from the intent of the Ordinance.

Attorney Leitner also addressed staff concerns about providing evidence of consent from the Condo for the proposed development. The trustees would need to ratify versus approve the proposal in advance.

Ron Bourque from Bourque Design went over the design and plans dated August 12, 2024. He said that because they were working within the existing footprint, the landscaping around it, which included many mature trees, would be maintained. Each unit would have a one-car garage with additional parking space on the exterior. Additionally, there would be two visitor parking spaces. The elimination of the existing building would allow an increase in open space. The materials and scale of the proposed buildings would be consistent with the existing.

Following the conclusion of his presentation, Architect Bourque invited Fergal Brennock to review the engineering plans. He said that the project would lead to a substantial reduction in impervious surface. Similarly, the footprint of the three new buildings was approximately half of the lot coverage of the existing convent. The existing sewer service would not need upgrading. Final utility provisions and other

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site requirements were under discussion with DPW. Overall, he concluded that the civil engineering plans were in harmony with the existing site.

Petitioner Steve Corbett, 14 Irving Park, provided the concluding remarks. He said he was disappointed by the Planning Board's recommendation to deny the petition. So far, his proposed plans had 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. He said that there was nothing comparable to this situation in Watertown and "granting relief would not set any unwarranted precedent." The convent was the last piece in the redevelopment of the former Rosary Academy. He discussed its rezoning 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.

Following the conclusion of this presentation, Chair SantucciRozzi opened the meeting for public comments.

Gerri Blitzman, 2C Locust Lane, original owner for 37 years, expressed her support for the project. She was concerned about the state of uncertainty for the existing building. Parking was challenging and the use was limited. Many of the residents were elderly and longtime residents. Also, she noted that the sisters could benefit from the receipts of the sale. She appreciated the attention the project received from the Planning Board.

Angelo Defrancesco, 4 B Locus Lane, said he was a resident since 2006 and a trustee since 2007. He stated that the project had unanimous support from the public and checked all the boxes. The developer had worked in partnership with the community and listened to their feedback. He was concerned about the safety of a vacant and unmonitored building. Not deciding soon would take the community back in time to find a solution.

Toby Reed, 31 Angela Ln, said she had lived here for eight years and been a trustee for three years. Upon her request, with a show of hands, about 15-20 attendees, showed their support for the project. She said they were impressed with the thoughtfulness and consideration shown by the Planning Board to their petition and hoped to receive the same from the Zoning Board. This was a unique situation brought on because of rezoning. She expressed her sympathy for the sisters who continued to pay their share of the condominium fees, utilities and other expenses. The neighbors were concerned about the vacant building. She also reported an incident of flooding due to frozen pipes caused by heating being turned off. The project had the support of the neighbors, and the developers had worked well with the unit owners proposing a design that fitted with the existing, also taking into account the parking issues.

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Bob D'Amelio, 36 Angela Lane, expressed his support for the project. He said that the design was compatible with the existing town houses and would not exacerbate the parking issues on site. Parking was also provided within the footprint of the existing building.

Cathy Cote, 32 Angela Lane said that she was an original owner. This was a very special place and could be redeveloped with a plan that so many supported. She did not think the building was worth saving.

Melissa Mintz, 20 Angela Lane, had been a resident for about 31 years and expressed her support for the project. She felt that the applicant had made a compelling case for the relief. The building had limited use from the inside, given the community bathroom, and community dining room that it had. The proposed building was more compatible with the rest of the site

Susan Lurier, said she had been on the Board of Trustees for 20 years. It was a community where everyone felt safe. She invited the Board to visit. Finding an appropriate use had taken a while and the proposed building blended well with other development in Watertown.

Emily Izzo, District City counsellor, expressed her support for the project, stating that the plans complemented the area and were consistent with the City's goals. They were well supported by the neighborhood, adding housing and green space to the city, and had ample parking. The plans presented the least financial burden to the owners and if not allowed, would impose a significant cost on all of them.

Vincent Piccirilli, City Council Vice President (remote) spoke about the uniqueness of the property to be considered, addressing the criteria for a variance. He stated that the building had limited uses. Based on the Staff Report, any use other than a vacant lot, religious use or education use would be non-conforming. Also, much had changed for the Catholic Church since the building was first constructed. Further, the convent was part of a condominium complex and any change to the site would require a two-third majority vote. No other property in Watertown had this requirement.

Councilor Piccirilli also said that the City's most recent Zoning Amendments supported more density, quite contrary to the spirit of Cluster Residential where the building was located. He also described the financial burden of this property to the sisters at present, and the consequences of any withdrawal of their share. He concluded his comments by asking the Board to seriously consider granting the variance

Chair SantucciRozzi read into the record names of residents who had provided comments via email.

Also read into the record was the letter received from Council President, Mark Sideris.

Chair opened the discussion to the Board. Member Odamah asked what other options had been considered for the site prior to the proposed plans. Steven Corbett said that the plans were designed to offer a low density project that was compatible with what was already on site in terms of scale. Also to leave space between the buildings.

Member Odamah asked if the community would prefer to replace the building. Steven Corbett said that the convent was an eyesore that did not fit with the existing buildings. Other uses of the building would conflict with the zoning requirements. He also discussed other configurations for the buildings, including

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eliminating access from Rosary Drive. Also to be taken into consideration was the requirement that it had to be approved by 75 % of the community.

Member Odamah clarified the amount of parking available—each townhouse unit would have 2 parking spaces. In addition, there would be two visitor spots.

Member Dale asked for clarification on the parking spaces for the entire site. Steven Corbett said that under the original special permit for Sienna Village, there were 162 parking spaces for St Joseph's Hall, daycare program and 59 units.

Member Dale summarized the options for the project—pull more variances or go through a rezoning process, as suggested by the Planning Board. He asked the petitioners why rezoning had not been pursued. Attorney Leitner explained the process it would entail, stating that this option was lengthy and had only been recently proposed.

Both Member Dale and Member Baker noted the unusual support shown by the residents.

Member Baker said that a higher density would impact not only Sienna Village but also the surrounding neighborhoods. She also commented on the orientation of the proposed buildings. It seemed that they were turned away from the rest of the neighborhood unlike the other buildings. Steve Corbett clarified that the front doors of three units faced Rosary Drive. The two-family in the back had the front door facing the interior driveway. Member Baker expressed concern that the proposed five units appeared separate from the others and were not integrated with the rest of the developments on site. Steve Corbett he did not see them as separate and isolated.

In response to concerns raised by Member Baker, Member Ferris said that he found the orientations similar to the existing. He also agreed that it created a little neighborhood just like other sections of the site. He also said that it seemed like a very special neighborhood, and it was impressive to see this turnout to support the proposal.

Member Ferris asked if the likely usability of the attic in Buildings 2/3 would impact the discussions. Staff said that those calculations would be reviewed by staff after the Board's determination.

He also noted that the grading allowed a walk-out basement for Buildings 2/3, providing the homeowners with additional living space with daylight. This was not reflected in the elevations which would need to be updated. Steve Corbett also confirmed that about 20 mature trees would be maintained.

Overall, Member Ferris said that the design seemed to fit well with the neighborhood. He asked for more detail and accuracy in the plans, including outdoor space plans for a potential patio/deck/retaining wall, which would not only enhance the marketability of the units but also give privacy and a neighborhood feel to the units, and resolve questions for the community regarding space utilization. He said that the plans should also reflect that the two two-family buildings were different. Each building should have its own floor plans and elevations to allow the garage door to be appropriately positioned. He also suggested the inclusion of a few smaller trees closer to the front entry of each unit.

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Chair SantucciRozzi asked questions related to the inspiration of the three- structure layout and number of units chosen. She also reiterated Member Ferris's request for more detail in the plans, including the outdoor space. Commenting on the nature of relief sought, she noted the various improvements proposed and the rationale for relief. She listed the revisions she wished to see including the half story calculations, updated elevations, plans for the outdoor space, floor plans and orientation of the garage, making sure the plans matched with what would be built. Also discussed was the fire truck access which needed to be finalized.

Motion to continue to December 18, 2024 was made by Member Ferris, seconded by Member Baker. Motion was approved (5-0) with Members Dale, Baker, Ferris, Odamah and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

Motion to adjourn was made by Member Ferris, seconded by Member Baker. Motion was approved (5-0) with Members Dale, Baker, Ferris, Odamah and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

The meeting ended at approximately 8:50 PM

MINUTES APPROVED:-----