



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
Samuel Odamah, Alternate

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MINUTES

On Wednesday evening, December 18, 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*, Greg Girard, *Alternate*;

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

Staff present (in-person): Gideon Schreiber, *Director of Planning and Zoning*; Sameena Pirani, *Administrative Specialist*; Larry Field, *Senior Planner*; Matthew Neubacher, *Planner*;

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

Cases: 6 & 12 Church Hill St

The Chair noted that the petition had been continued to the ZBA's January 22, 2025 meeting.

1 Rosary Dr

Attorney Leitner, representing the petitioner Stephen Corbett, provided a recap of the relief sought and noted that the petition had received a favorable staff report based on the ratios for density and appropriate intensity of use. The proposed plans had also been fully supported by the Condominium Association. Following the conclusion of his presentation, he invited Petitioner Steven Corbett to go over the updated plans. These included separate floor plans for the two two-families reflecting the differently

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oriented garage doors because of the grade drop of the rear units; revised plan for the fire ladder truck turnaround and maneuvering, to allow backout with a 2-point turn, approved by the fire dept; parking spot swap of visitor spots with the Condo Association to create a fire lane; decks (unit 1, unit #2 and #3) and patios (unit # 4 and #5); Bulkhead walkouts for units #2 and #3; addition of basement windows for all three buildings; addition of larger trees, red maples, in front of units #1, #4 and #5 along Rosary Drive; material description and window specification on elevations; half-story calculation which required adjustments to the roof plan; maintaining 2 existing parallel parking spaces on Rosary Dr at the request of the Condo Association; the basement plan with the large family room, mechanical room and a storage room.

After confirming that there were no new comments from the audience and no hands raised on Zoom, the Chair opened discussion to the Board.

Member Ferris observed that the basement plans did not reflect the window wells. He appreciated the updates, noting that the petitioner had been very responsive to the Board's comments from the last meeting.

Member Dale noted that the stairwells in the first-floor plans for unit #4 and #5 were not reflected in the basement plans. Architect Ron Bourque from Bourque Design stated that these would be added in the construction documents.

Member Odamah expressed concern for the privacy of units #2 and #3 from the neighboring apartments. The petitioner said that the Condo Association had discussed this and requested the installation of fencing, which he had agreed to.

Member Odamah noted the unanimous support from residents and asked if there were any concerns or negative feedback expressed in the process. Petitioner Steve Corbett confirmed that he had not received any concerns. He had grown up in the neighborhood and knew a lot of the residents.

Chair SantucciRozzi expressed her appreciation for the updated plans. She had no additional comments.

Chair SantucciRozzi read into the record the letter from Councilor John Airasian, sharing his enthusiasm for the project and acknowledging Mr. Corbett's hard work and vision for the neighborhood.

Chair SantucciRozzi summarized the nature of relief requested, noting that there had been an addendum to the Staff Report. She requested updated calculations to the Zoning Table for the impervious coverage, building coverage and open space with the addition of the decks, bulkheads and alterations to parking. She especially noted the overwhelming support for the project, which had played an important role in the Board's consideration of the petition. She noted that any motions made would be predicated on the submission of an updated Zoning Block analysis.

Member Ferris moved to: 1) approve the requested variances and 2) amend Special Permit #86-87-17SP/make a Special Permit Finding to incorporate the new site plans, with the conditions proposed by staff and the additional condition that Petitioner update the zoning summary for this project. The motion was seconded by Member Dale. Motion was approved (5-0) with Members Dale, Baker, Ferris, Odamah and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

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77 Forest St

Chair said that Member Dale had recused himself and would not be participating in this case. Members participating would be Members Heep, Ferris, Baker, Girard and Chair SantucciRozzi.

Member Ferris read the legal notice.

Attorney Leitner, representing the petitioner and owner BYB LLC introduced the case, describing the relevant permitting history, scope of the project, proposed plans and nature of relief sought. He said that effort had been made to minimize the massing. Also, there was no parking on site, which was close to municipal parking and public transportation, and consistent with Watertown's Comprehensive Plan to provide affordable housing. The proposed plans had been discussed with the abutting three-family and well-received. The project also had a favorable staff report. Concluding his presentation, he invited architect Vahe Ohannessian from Boston Architects and Builders, Inc to detail the plans. Based on the presentation, the total increase in height would be about 4.5'. The living area on the second floor would be in the front. Most of the work would be in the interior. The shape of the building would remain the same.

Chair SantucciRozzi opened the discussion to the public.

Jeet Chakraborty, resident in the adjacent 3-family, stated that the petitioners had been very receptive to their feedback. As residents on the second story, they had expressed concerns about privacy and the additional height, which had been effectively addressed.

Margaret Wong, 74 Forest St, (attending remotely) said she wanted to make the correction that the property was located at the corner of Fayette and Forest St, not Forest and Summer as stated by Attorney Leitner. Also, she asked if there were any improvements to visibility for that intersection given current safety concerns. Staff explained the challenges of addressing this issue. It had a historically hard corner. Also, what looked like a city sidewalk, was the owner's front yard, limiting the City's options for improvement. Chair SantucciRozzi said that an easement would be unreasonable given the size of the lot. In response to Margaret Wong's request for a 4-way Stop Sign, staff suggested this be discussed with the Traffic Commission and DPW.

Rosmary Sheehan, 24 Quirk St, (attending remotely) reiterated the concerns expressed by Margaret Wong. She was concerned about the lack of on-site parking. Future parking on Fayette St by the owners would exacerbate the visibility issue and parking along Forest St was already a challenge.

After confirming that there were no other public comments, Chair SantucciRozzi opened discussion to the Board.

Member Heep, attending remotely, expressed his support for the project, saying that this was an "interesting and positive use" of the property. He recognized the limited space on the lot and asked if the petitioners had proposed any improvements to the site, in terms of planting or landscaping. Attorney Leitner said that the only space available was owned by the adjacent condominium and "fenced in". Once relief was granted, the owners of the condominium and the single family could discuss

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improvements to the grassy area. Member Heep would like to see the plans for the proposed improvements to this area prior to the granting of relief.

Based on further discussion, Chair SantucciRozzi noted the absence of easements on the plot plan. Attorney Leitner confirmed that the area under discussion would remain grass, and have a gate. Member Heep concluded his comments by saying that he would like to hear about this from other members of the Board.

Member Odamah agreed with the comments made by Member Heep regarding improvements to the site, and the visibility and parking concerns raised by neighbors. In response to his question about on-site parking, Attorney Leitner stated that the grassy portion under discussion was not large enough.

Member Odamah asked why the petitioners had chosen to limit height to 18 ft versus the allowed 35 feet. Attorney Leitner said that it was to minimize the impact on the neighbors, especially the 3-unit condominium. Also, any improvements would be in conjunction with these neighbors, given the shared space.

Member Baker supported comments made by Members Heep and Odamah for improvements in the landscaping. She also confirmed that the portion of the property that was a sidewalk would remain as it is. She noted that the flat roof was unlike others on the street, and while there had been several improvements and rebuilds in the neighborhood, she wondered about the “visual cohesiveness” of the design with other developments. She asked if this had been discussed with the neighbors. Also, given the limited footprint, if there was a reason for leaving the basement unfinished, instead of using it for living space. Attorney Leitner said that the plan was to leave it unfinished for storage.

Member Girard appreciated the choice of a flat roof to minimize the impact on the abutters. He asked about the nature of the mechanical equipment screened on top. Attorney Leitner said that the location of the condensers had been chosen to mitigate the noise and not use the limited ground space. Architect Ohanessian said that the new equipment was quiet and would be screened. It was five feet away from property lines which would help mitigate sound and visual impact.

Member Girard noted that the property seemed vacant when he had passed by that morning. He had observed signs for “No Dumping.” Based on this, he said any development would be an improvement. He asked about run-off and drainage given the flat roof. Architect Ohanessian addressed these concerns, saying that a gutter and downspout system would be put in place along with adjustments to the roof pitch, to divert water from the public way. He also asked about the colors on the exterior. The architect confirmed that there would be altogether three colors chosen to break up the massing visually. He also favored the full glass exposure at the corner. While the design was unique and unlike most on the street, he felt that it could be a bridge to future design.

Member Ferris asked a few questions about the history of the site and building. Staff explained that in 1954, it was formally created into three lots A, B, C which included another lot beyond the 3-family which also had shared access. He asked why the petitioners had chosen to have a family room versus an additional bedroom. Other questions related to the thickness of the siding, if the addition would touch the electrical wires overhead, height of the rooftop element around the mechanical equipment, and

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building materials. He noted that the window placement in the elevations did not coordinate with the floor plans.

Member Ferris expressed his concern about the extent of relief sought stating that the site was in compliance only with open space ratios.

Chair SantucciRozzi reiterated Member Ferris's concerns about the extent of relief sought, given the existing commercial use and non-conforming current and proposed parking. She noted the absence of a site plan. The plot plan only showed the building footprint. They did not display the easements that had been described. The architectural plans also lacked detail. She said that many of the questions asked by the Board were triggered by the absence of sufficient detail in the plans. She also questioned the accuracy of the Zoning table, completed as part of the application. While she supported the adaptive reuse of the property, the Board did not have adequate and accurate data to determine that the change would not be substantially more detrimental. She would like to see the plans include details of the interior and exterior, entry and exit ways, open space and landscape plans. She asked if the changes would be itemized in the updated submittal.

Member Ferris also asked that the petitioners reconsider and further explore the option of a more cohesive single design for the exterior, aligned with the other houses in the neighborhood.

Chair SantucciRozzi read into the record a letter received by Kelly and Ryan Kurlbaum expressing their concerns about the relief requested, based on the limited space, no setbacks or parking.

Member Ferris clarified that the petitioners had no relationship with the owners and/ or residents of the adjacent condominium.

Motion to continue to the January 22, 2025 meeting was made by Member Ferris, seconded by Member Girard. Motion was approved 5-0, with Members Heep, Ferris, Baker, Girard and Chair Santucci-Rozzi voting in favor.

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

The meeting ended at approximately 8:50 PM

MINUTES APPROVED:-----