

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: January 8, 2025 PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

PRESENT: Janet Buck, Chair; Payson Whitney; Jason Cohen; Abigail Hammett; Rachael Sack;
Sarah Scott - Alternate
Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber, Planning Director; Larry Field,
Planner

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Payson Whitney motioned to approve Minutes of 12/11/2024 meeting.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

Abigail Hammett recused herself from the hearing because her company is involved in the next project.

CASES PENDING

615 Arsenal Holding LLC, et al

Janet Buck, the case before us was presented at the December 11, 2024 meeting of the Planning Board.

Michela DeSantis, this is a request for an amendment to the Arsenal Yards Master Plan PB-2016-03. Tonight is a brief presentation, questions raised by the Planning Board have been answered and responses submitted.

Michael D'Angelo, Landscape Architect, the lot consists of lot of impervious surfaces, the corner of Arsenal and Forge Streets identified through new planters. Ramp has been widened, colors, plantings added. Island revised, retaining wall and more planters added.

Michela DeSantis, ramp and roads widened to allow truck access, 7 parking spaces added.

Larry Field, I will highlight few points in the staff report. Access for pedestrians is consistent with the rest of the Arsenal Yards and the guidelines. Contours were added to provide visual interest. Connections between pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles have been improved. This is a conceptual approval. The second point is for first time users of the criteria. Sustainability, bringing together all the pieces of the project. Project is meeting all the requirements, we are always trying to do more than that. Parking requirement, we have more spaces in the garage than on the surface. Home Depot cannot cut any more spaces, there is a flexibility in the future, shadow parking of up to 100 spaces can be created. Supplemental conditions: #3 prior approval can remain, #10 permit expirations Jan 2017 – 10 year period, expiring in January 2027, in 3 years come in for final Special Permit review, starting construction in 2 years. If Master Plan Special Permit expire, they will have to come back for extension. #27 – it is necessary to have Clerk of Works. Subdivision is not done by the City, the petitioner would have to go to the Director of Community Development & Planning and ask for endorsement. There are further minor conditions added.

Gideon Schreiber, the Planning Board authorized the Director in 1980.

Jason Cohen, is the merchandizing in the parking lot temporary/seasonal? I like the island in the landscaping area, I need to understand the area.

Gideon Schreiber, specific areas are identified, shed area implemented, then changed. Plans are available in the Planning office, identifying the areas.

Jason Cohen, if David Gamble referenced these areas, we have not seen them.

Mark Deschenes, Boylston Properties, shed area has been there since 2019 and it is not seasonal. Trash area was relocated.

Gideon Schreiber, the comment should be uploaded to the case file. Peer review is given to the staff, then included in the staff report, we have not been printed them.

Jason Cohen, I want to see how did the modification happened, buried within the Watertown Square changes.

Janet Buck, is there a new version of the Zoning Ordinance printed?

Larry Field, it is hard to get tables done correctly, there is less demand for hard copies.

Rachael Sack, solar assessment will be re-assessed during Special Permit review. We are interested in flow of the traffic, speed bumps, etc. Will the trees lining the Home Depot area remain?

Payson Whitney, #6 is little odd, why should someone else fix Arsenal Yards problems.

Gideon Schreiber, subdivision plan was signed by the Planning Board director and recorded. Significant improvements were made to Arsenal Street.

Sarah Scott, I have asked this question in December, is Home Depot interested in ownership, there is a comment about the entire property in Master Plan.

Mark Deschenes, originally the property consisted of 2 different "condos". 1.Majestic theater is part of the Master Plan, 2.Home Depot. Now they are one condo unit.

Gideon Schreiber, one parcel east/west. They have to figure out what can legally happen. This is not a typical set of parcels.

Mark Deschenes, some of it is the legacy of the original parcel.

Larry Field, the decisions are on a conceptual Special Permit basis.

Sarah Scott, I am concerned about the conditions for special permit not keeping with the criteria. I feel like all these different elements are being kind of shoehorned in. There is not really complete streets approach that is guiding the development here. Same thing with just thinking about open space or a neighborhood access and some of the sustainability and climate considerations. Some flags were raised in the staff report about the low number of EV charging spaces and solar arrays on the building. Having too much parking and making it less ideal for people to walk and drive to the site also is related to those climate impacts. I am really struggling with seeing the value of this development big picture, but I am not satisfied with the development that is being presented to us.

Janet Buck, I appreciate the level of detail to address concerns from last month meeting. Is there enough bicycle parking?

Payson Whitney motioned to approve the request for an amendment to the Arsenal Yards Master Plan PB-2016-03 to incorporate Phase 6 based on the finding that the addition of this Phase in accordance with the Watertown Zoning Ordinance Section 5.18 and the conditions in the January 3, 2025 staff report and the January 8, 2025 staff report addendum.

Rachael Sack seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-1 In favor, Sarah Scott opposed

103 Nichols Ave

Michael Lara, former Watertown Housing Authority Director, this is a request for reasonable accommodation to allow the construction of a Group Home for 5 persons with disabilities to live alone with support. We are working with Beaverbrook Step and other agencies. We want to convert into a group home, there are not many in Boston area. The project was approved by DDS (Department of Development Services), we are proposing 24/7 support for challenged adults. Clients will be educated, there are many on a waiting list. Many such houses are operated by Beaverbrook Step, they are located near bus lines, shops, etc. DDS has certain site requirements, guidelines, medical management, etc.

John Mucciarone, project manager with ZeroEnergy Design, we have worked with WHA, Beaverbrook Step, etc. We are maximizing accessibility, the 3000 s.f. building will have 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms on the first floor, 2 bedrooms and 1 bath on the second floor. We are providing full landscape plan, van parking and impervious surface in the rear.

Michael Lara, the site is fully ADA compliant. This will revitalize the site, we are working with the Willow Park project. The structure will remain affordable, we have received \$50,000 toward the design of the project from Beaverbrook Step.

Larry Field, the staff recommends conditional approval. SPR qualifies under Section 40A, Section 3 Fair Housing Law- individuals with disability, justified by the need. Building coverage is 39%, where 30% is allowed. We are proposing 2 handicap accessible bathrooms, departing from dimensional requirements. Accessible van is necessary, it is our conclusion that all requirements have been met.

Gideon Schreiber, all PB members are allowed to participate in the discussion but only can vote on the project.

Michael Lara, the van will be on the site as needed, parked overnight.

Rachael Sack, 2 parking spaces are reserved for the staff. Is there a fence around the property.

Abigail Hammett, I am in support of the project which will provide critical service. Site was purchased 40 years ago. Could there be a community garden for the residents? Trash enclosure is located under the living rooms windows, could it be placed elsewhere?

Michael Lara, there are issues with relocating.

Gideon Schreiber, we will look at it, you don't need as much accommodation for trash. It is not visible under the window.

Jason Cohen, I am very much for the project. I have seen it when it was before CPC, now is finally in front of PB. There were the same comments regarding the trash & recycling. They will be using the same totes as the town residents and surround the area with stockade, which has more reason to swap the space.

Gideon Schreiber, we should be more flexible regarding the location.

Jason Cohen, elevations are showing bedroom and bathroom windows of the same size, the bathroom windows could be smaller.

Payson Whitney, dimensional changes are reasonable. There is a waiting list, it is ideal to have local residents near their families. Are the rooms leased?

Michael Lara, DDS pays the rent, it is paid through the residents income.

Janet Buck, I live 2 blocks away, we have been waiting for this for a long time. The windows should be changed, trash bins can be turned around. I have seen a presentation in the library long time ago.

Alan Gallagher, Chairman of the Housing Authority, this project will help 5 individuals, there are always development challenges in the family.

Nicole Gardner, City Councilor, there is a strong support within the community. Traffic Commission does reserve parking for handicapped residents, could it extend to the staff?

Rita Cavallo, I am surprised that it took 40 years. It is difficult to integrate people with disabilities, they should be located near their families.

Payson Whitney motioned that the Planning Board grant site plan review approval based on the finding that the proposed project meets the criteria set forth under Section 9.03 with the general purpose of the ordinance outlined in Section 1.00 of the Watertown Zoning Ordinance, under Section 5.01.2 for the construction of the proposed group home with the following conditions and with the added flexibility to modify the trash enclosure, including any resulting dimensional waiver, subject to staff review.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 Unanimous

Janet Buck closed the public meeting at 8:45 pm.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:45 PM

MINUTES APPROVED: _____