

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: March 12, 2025, 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;

ABSENT: Jason Cohen; Sarah Scott

Sameena Pirani, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber, Planning Director; Larry Field, Planner, Matthew Neubacher

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Payson Whitney motioned to approve Minutes of 1/8/2024 meeting.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

CASES PENDING

9-11-13 Boyd St

Janet Buck read the legal notice and provided a disclosure statement. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Boys and Girls Club, which previously housed First Path Daycare. Since they are no longer tenants, there are no grounds for bias or conflict of interest.

Maksim Bolyasnyy, President of University Prints Building, LLC, and owner, explained the rationale for the request before the Board. He stated that the proposed apartment units would better serve the community than the existing use of two office units, adding much needed housing.

The staff suggested a favorable recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals for the proposed project. Based on staff analysis, the site was complex due to the mix of uses; including a daycare facility and residential units, with the potential for an additional use in the rear basement. The site has constraints, such as limited parking and limited outdoor space. The adaptive reuse of the front portion of the building for residential units seems logical. It would help address the city's housing needs, though these units would not be deed-restricted affordable housing, and rental prices have not been specified. The staff

report expressed concerns primarily about parking, with recommendations for parking management measures, including two full-time parking spaces in the garage (with four units-two spaces would comply with the .5 parking ratio in the NMU district), and the ability to do shared parking with the daycare facility, if there were any additional cars on site.

Staff described a Status Report on compliance with conditions from the 2023 Boyd Street decision, which was requested by a Planning Board member.

Evans Huber, representing University Prints Building, stated that lifting the conditions from the Site Plan review decision and applying them to this petition was “inappropriate.” In making their recommendation to the Board, the conditions proposed should be limited to the addition of one more parking space for the two additional units.

Chair Janet Buck opened discussion to the public.

Michelle Alpert, 139 Galen St, stated that existing parking problems would only be exacerbated by adding more residential units. There were no attendants on site to manage the parking, and people parked in the easement. Additionally, there were street parking restrictions. She was also concerned about the safety of the children during drop-off and pick up.

Silvester Buscemi, 141 Galen St, raised concerned about the long-term implications of granting the special permit. He suggested that the Board wait for the outcome of the Petitioner’s appeal in Land Court. The existing non-compliance with the conditions of the previous decision added to his concerns.

Chair Janet Buck opened discussion to the Board.

Upon request, staff provided additional context and clarification on the history and relief requested for the property. Staff stated that the focus of the special permit was to add two more residential units, bringing the total to four residential units, in a mixed-use building with a daycare and a vacant unidentified space on the lower level in the rear. The shared parking arrangement for the daycare and residential units was approved through site plan review and would be managed by the daycare’s use on site. The four units did not have access to parking on site during the daycare hours of operation. In response to Petitioner’s statement that the garage parking requirement was unreasonable, staff said there was potential for the number of off-site parking spaces to be modified, based on evidence of usage and occupancy of the building.

Janet Buck said she supports the additional two units, provided parking and other issues are resolved. In making their recommendation to the Zoning Board, Payson Whitney said that the ZBA should regard this as a standalone application while also taking into account the present conditions on the site. Also, there should be a legal opinion to address the complexities of the case, especially with helping the ZBA understand the relationship between the approved Site Plan and the current application. He noted a small technical issue with the engineer's stamp on the plans—absence of a date on the Professional Engineer's stamp.

Abigail Hammett asked why the Petitioner could not be clearer about the requested zoning relief. The request seems to be to use the two dedicated daycare facility parking spaces for the residential uses. She suggested either asking for a reduction in required parking or separating the residential and daycare parking entirely by using the off-site garage spaces. She expressed concern about the safety of children during pick-up and drop-off. She also questioned the commitment of the petitioner to adhere to additional conditions, given the legal challenge to the previous decision.

Evan Hubert stated that the Board should focus on the residential units and not revisit or impose conditions on the daycare facility. Abigail Hammett said the Petitioner opened the door to this issue by saying that the residential units would use the same parking spaces as the daycare facility.

Staff clarified that the Petitioner did not ask for a reduction in parking and, therefore, it was not in the public notice for this meeting. While the focus of the special permit application is on the residential units and not the daycare, the special permit decision and any conditions must relate to the whole site and how it will operate with the mix of uses.

Janet Buck stated that the parking spaces on-site should be dedicated to the daycare during the day, without competing demands from the residential units. She expressed support for the permit, provided that parking needs were arranged off-site to prevent any potential conflicts with the day care use.

Payson Whitney summarized the key points to be included in the motion. The Planning Board was in favor of adding two new residential units at the site. There were discrepancies in the parking information provided in the application that need to be clarified so that the ZBA understands the requested relief pertaining to parking on and/or off-site. The Board thought it would be better to have two off-site parking spaces for the four residential units to avoid conflicts with the daycare use. Condition 13 should be reviewed by staff and the City's legal counsel. If parking was shared between the day care and the residential units, they suggested that certain conditions be applied, such as monitoring the parking

situation. The Board also mentioned that the applicant could request to adjust the number of parking spaces, should there be changes in the use of the site or other conditions that arise. The motion was seconded by Rachael Sack and approved unanimously (4-0).

Willow Park

Janet Buck stated that the Planning Board would not be making a decision, just providing comments.

Staff stated the Planning Boards role in this case. The ZBA was the permit granting authority under Chapter 40B. While the Planning Board was not required to make a formal recommendation, it could provide comments or information to the ZBA. These comments could help inform the ZBA's decision, especially about the project's consistency with local planning goals and the Comprehensive Plan. The conditions imposed by the ZBA should be reasonable and not render the project uneconomic. Staff also explained the two ways the Planning Board could provide their comments.

Jacqueline Sullivan, Executive Director of the Watertown Housing Authority along with Mel Miller project manager, went over the project background (including existing conditions, timeline, Chapter 40B procedure, and potential sources of funding), proposed development (including unit and affordability).

Ian Kenney, from Mass Design Group provided an overview of the project design, including design elements, material palette, goals and community input.

Emily Hunt from Copley Wolff presented the landscape and open space plans highlighting the accessible, flexible and community friendly spaces, reuse of materials, sustainable approach and attention to pedestrian safety.

Ian Kenney went over the parking plans, highlighting the two-level parking deck and utilization of topography to integrate the parking deck with the natural slope of the site, making it less intrusive in the landscape

Following the presentations was an opportunity for the Board to ask questions.

Janet Buck asked for more information on the sustainability features. Ian Kenney described the Passive House standards, utilizing electric systems and solar energy.

Payson Whitney complimented the design, especially the recessed balconies. It did not seem like a typical public housing project. Ian Kenney confirmed that adequate screening

would be incorporated into the design to soften the edges and ensure privacy for neighbors.

Janet Buck suggested reusing the granite for landscaping.

Abigail Hammett complimented the design including the façade treatment, color palette, integration of brick and the updated visual texture at the top. She suggested the need for more ground level perspectives to help community members better visualize the project.

Rachael Sack said the project was a welcome improvement to Willow Park.

Payson Whitney made a motion to express their strong support for the project; it was seconded by Abigail Hammett. Motion was approved unanimously (4-0). Their comments would be summarized by staff and presented to the Zoning Board.

Driveway Regulations

Staff recommended that the Planning Board confirm that this interim determination was consistent with the Zoning Ordinance, and recommended that the Ordinance be updated in the future to incorporate this interpretation into table Section 6.02 (c,) amending the table and note, as well as section 5.08 (f) (6) as necessary. After some discussion and a few clarification questions, the Board agreed to make a motion to confirm the Zoning Enforcement Officer's determination. Payson Whitney moved, seconded by Abigail Hammett. Motion was approved unanimously (4-0).

MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:55 pm MINUTES Approved: _____