



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, April 23, 2025, 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*; Christopher Heep, *Member*; Samuel Odamah, *Alternate*; Gregory Girard, *Alternate*.
Member(s) remote: Alexander Dale, *Member*;

Members Absent: David Ferris, *Member*.

Staff present (in-person): Gideon Schreiber, Director of Planning and Zoning; Sameena Pirani, *Principal Department Assistant*; Matthew Neubacher, *Planner*; Tony Mancini *Zoning Enforcement Officer*.

Chair SantucciRozzi opened the meeting. She introduced staff, noted the members in attendance, reviewed the agenda and order of cases. Since one member was remote (Member Dale), all votes would be by roll. Also, except for Willow Park, Member Girard would be the designated alternate for cases heard this evening. Member Odamah would participate, but not vote. She also explained how the meeting and methods of participation from the public could be accessed remotely.

The motion to approve March 26, 2025, meeting minutes was made by Member Heep and seconded by Member Baker. Motion was approved (5-0) with Members Dale, Baker, Heep, Odamah Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

Continued Case: Willow Park

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Mel Miller, project manager at POAH (Preservation of Affordable Housing) introduced the team members present in person—including Cory Mian-(Senior Vice President, Real Estate Development, POAH), Architect David Saladik (Mass Design Group), Landscape Architect Emily Hunt (Copley Wolff), Hannah Kilson (Nolan Sheehan Patten LLP), Jacqui Sullivan, executive director of Watertown Housing Authority. Also introduced were other members of the Watertown Housing Authority and (later) other members of the team joining remotely, including their civil engineers (Nitsch Engineering), and traffic engineers (Howard Stein Hudson),

Mel Miller said that the presentation would include a follow up from the March Meeting on programmatic and design elements.

Programmatic Focus

Loading Plan. The existing loading zone would serve Buildings A and B and was sufficient for both buildings. Building C had a dedicated parking lot behind it.

Car Share Waiver: The team would maintain a car share waiver request to maximize resident parking. However, they were open to a future car share partnership if residents' needs changed.

Affordability Conditions: They believed they had reached recommended conditions that would meet the ZBAs goals, protecting existing tenants and ensuring future affordability.

Design:

Playground location: The proposed location was best for both residents and the greater community

Playground Fencing: A fencing analysis was provided that included both existing and proposed conditions.

Raised Crosswalk: They would continue to explore a traffic calming measure such as a raised crosswalk/ raised intersection with city staff, including DPW.

David Saladik gave a design update. He said that the building design was in the early stages. Their goal was to break up the massing using distinct volumes, colors, façade textures and window sizes. Juliet balconies would add depth and texture while the horizontal reveals would reduce the perceived height and add depth. Placement of the buildings was strategic, with taller ones placed near open space and lower buildings next to the residential neighborhood fabric. Screening would continue to be investigated.

Also discussed were Zoning (use and dimensional) and other non-Zoning waivers (local demo delay) and inclusionary zoning requirement.

Following the presentation, Chair SantucciRozzi opened the discussion to the Board.

Member Dale followed up about secure e-bike storage and charging. The team said they would maintain having covered structures with lockable features. They were also open to exploring other options that may not be outdoors, such as cages.

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Member Dale appreciated the updated renderings on solar, move to renewable energy, and the single slope versus sawtooth design

Based on Member Baker's question regarding any known current non-conforming setbacks, Mel Miller stated that this was a residential use in an industrial zone. The team would need to investigate this question further.

In response to other questions from Member Baker, Mel Miller said that the electricity generated by solar panels would be used for the benefit of the residents. Also, the landscape plan aimed to use mostly evergreens and shrubs for year-round attractiveness. However, for the vines it may be necessary to use deciduous plants that offer seasonal interest (e.g. flowers) especially due to difficulty finding native plantings. Final choices would be made in consultation with POA, and consideration of maintenance and aesthetics.

Regarding Member Odamah's questions on design, David Saladik stated that the project was in the early schematic design phase. No major changes were suggested to the building's massing, height and location. Design refinements were expected as the project progressed. Current renderings showed gradation and variation. Specific materials and composition were yet to be finalized.

Chair Santuccirozzi confirmed that the e-bike accommodations in the parking deck had not been incorporated into the design. She acknowledged the comments related to architecture, especially by Member Ferris. These would be reflected in the conditions.

Regarding the vegetative screens, she was concerned about aesthetics and maintenance; She stated that if these could not be kept visually attractive year-round, especially at higher elevations where growth would be challenging, replacement with more practical alternatives would be suggested. Priority would be given to blocking light and glare for neighboring properties, and a unified, practical screening approach be considered. All this would be reflected in the conditions.

Chair SantucciRozzi also acknowledged ongoing discussions about affordability and expressed her gratitude to the legal counsel and staff for their continued efforts to balance developer and community needs, especially regarding the existing units.

Chair opened the discussion to the public.

Libby Shaw from Trees for Watertown expressed concern about preserving the shade trees on the property, especially protecting their root systems during construction and providing proper care afterward. Emily Hunt from Copley Wolff explained that the design team had been working closely with other professionals to protect these trees, including the provision of temporary irrigation during construction. The trees had also been assessed by an arborist to determine which ones could be preserved/removed due to poor condition or being invasive. Libby Shaw appreciated the efforts to preserve the trees, given their value to the community.

Closing the discussion, Chair SantucciRozzi noted that all previously raised issues had been addressed, including the vegetated screen and the façade comments. Staff would ensure that feedback from the Board was incorporated as the design moved forward. Motion to continue the matter to May 28, 2025, was made by Member Heep, seconded by Member Baker. Motion was

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unanimously approved (5-0), with members Heep, Baker, Dale, Odamah and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

75 Spring St

Member Heep read the legal notice.

Ryan Wittig from Kinvarra Capital LLC, along with his architect Phil Sima from Balance Architects, provided an overview of the proposed project. The presentation included the context of the neighborhood, existing conditions, parking, vehicle maneuverability and design changes based on feedback from the Planning Board.

Staff explained why the project required a special permit, even though the zone supported multifamily housing. The parcel's exclusion from the TODO overlay, combined with use and size triggered the special permit.

Chair SantucciRozzi confirmed the latest revisions to the project. These included windows on the driveway side, relocation of the condenser units-- changed from a stacked to a linear arrangement, and front landscaping that replaced the street tree with ornamental grasses.

Chair SantucciRozzi opened discussion to the Board.

Member Girard noted that the single lane 100ft driveway could be problematic in emergency scenarios and during concurrent vehicle entry and exits. Ryan Wittig listed the mitigation strategies including the flashing pedestrian light mounted near the driveway entrance, resident familiarity with driving patterns—giving priority to the exiting car, adjacent property sharing the easement but also having its own independent driveway. Member Girard said that the success of the plan was highly dependent on driver cooperation and clear sightlines.

Member Girard confirmed the location of the condensers.

Member Heep expressed concerns about the scale, massing and neighborhood impact of the building proposed. While technically zoning compliant, he noted that the building appeared very large and tall, particularly from the right and rear, “with little to no deference to neighbors or green space.” Ryan Wittig acknowledged the project's visual and contextual impact. He stated that the project aligned with the City's goal for the new WSQ1---adding housing, increasing density and revitalization of Watertown Square. He had also spoken to the direct abutters, who had expressed support for the project.

Member Baker pointed out that the easement was shown as a road, not a driveway. The plan was to keep it looking like a driveway.

Member Baker pointed out that wisteria, proposed for landscaping, was an invasive species and should not be used. She suggested the use of native, non-invasive, ever-green species to enhance visual quality year-long and support pollinators. The landscape plans needed to be revised to reflect the change requested.

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Member Odamah asked questions about the evolution of the building design particularly the shift to the current tripartite design.

Chair SantucciRozzi raised concerns about cars potentially driving on the grass to maneuver in the parking area. It was suggested that the landscape area could be chamfered (angled) to prevent this. She also noted that the green space was mainly private and only accessible to residents. Overall, the building felt cramped although zoning requirements were met. She suggested softening the building's appearance such as adjusting the front corner area near the party wall or adjusting landscaping to make the project less dense.

Chair SantucciRozzi suggested reducing the intensity of the proposal and making design adjustments. She stated that the current design was "tipping" the balance and suggested shrinking or shifting the building to allow for greater setbacks or relief on the non-driveway side. She also expected a more analytical response on how the project met all the required findings under the special permit standards.

Member Girard asked about the process for the art.

Dale asked about the status of the dispute over the shared easement. The petitioner stated that a mutual agreement was being worked out. He also said that the proposed residential use would be less burdensome than the continued use as a warehouse which required more frequent loading/unloading.

Chair SantucciRozzi opened the discussion to the public.

Dan McAdam, the owner of 81-83 Street, raised several concerns. He was particularly concerned about the increased traffic in the shared driveway. The easement was used for truck deliveries. It was proposed that the unit owners would use the same narrow driveway. This would cause conflicts and congestion. Additionally, exiting vehicles might need to back out onto Spring Street, a safety hazard for pedestrians.

Chair SantucciRozzi appreciated the concerns expressed by Dan McAdam. She said the comments would help the Board better understand how to weigh the impact of the proposed project on existing neighbors and businesses. She also said that the Board was not able to make legal determinations about the easement terms and enforceability.

Jacqueline Van Leeuwen (remote), 32 Whites Ave expressed her support for the project. She did not see this as "pushing the envelope." It aligned with new zoning. She commended the applicant for fitting five units on the site, saying that it supported much needed housing.

Libby Shaw commented on the landscaping plan recommending evergreen planting in front as was suggested by Member Baker. She advocated better soil preparation and suggested the applicant consult with a landscaping professional to select trees that would bring maximum benefit to the neighborhood in terms of their size and how well they worked in that space.

Chair SantucciRozzi noted, for the record, the letters of support from Sher Wahab (19 Maude Ter), Charles Patsios (28 Maude Ter), Housing for All Watertown Steering Committee, and Dennis Dyer (67-73 & 66-68 Spring St). Motion to continue the matter to May 28, 2025, was made by Member Heep,

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seconded by Member Baker. Motion was unanimously approved (5-0), with members Heep, Baker, Dale, Girard and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

172-174 Summer St

Member Heep read the legal notice.

Chair SantucciRozzi confirmed that the project had the same use (two family home), just alteration to a non-conforming structure.

Mike Mena gave a detailed presentation that included the scope of the project, existing conditions, zoning relief requested, proposed plans, including parking and access improvements, and landscape enhancements.

Following the presentation, Chair SantucciRozzi opened the discussion to the Board.

Member Dale asked questions about the interior layout of the second-floor addition, sustainability of the project and maneuverability of the cars. He pointed out that most people would have preferred southern exposure and view for the master bedroom. Mike Mena stated that the proposed configuration was the best fit given space constraints.

Noting the removal of the chimney, Member Dale asked about the owner's energy plan--if the home was intended to be all electric or if they would keep the gas connection. The owner was undecided at this time. Given the increased number of bedrooms and (possible basement use), Member Dale asked if the project could lead to more cars on the street. Mike Mena stated that Summer Street had no street parking, and the drive aisle would be restricted to vehicle passage (no parking). Proximity to transit, walkability, and demographics of the location were other reasons cited to address these concerns.

Member Baker suggested adding plantings at the head of the parking spaces to give coverage to the neighboring property, particularly to screen headlights from the cars. She also suggested replacing the boxwoods with native plants like hollies that were more environmentally beneficial. These suggestions were received positively by Mike Mena.

Member Girard asked about the rationale for the saltbox style roof in the back. Mike Mena said that it would maintain a modest profile, reduce the impact on the surrounding neighborhood and provide the necessary living space.

Chair SantucciRozzi expressed concerns about maneuverability on the lot and the lack of additional parking spaces to be provided. Importantly, regarding parking, the Chair noted that changing the nonconforming parking arrangement will require an additional Special Permit Finding. Mr. Mena acknowledged that this was included as part of the application. Staff noted the plan reduced front yard pavement and curb cuts. The Chair further requested that a bump-out be added to the parking area to facilitate maneuverability and bike racks be added to compensate for the low

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number of automobile parking spaces. Member Dale suggested adding discreet, secure bike parking, which was supported by the Chair. Since the parking layout was referenced in the application, the Board agreed it could be addressed through a special permit finding.

Chair SantucciRozzi opened discussion to the public.

Co-owners of 184 and 186 Summer St (attending remotely) shared concerns. Specifically asked were the mitigation measures for rodent migration, plans for tree removal and impact on sewer line, sunlight and shadow impacts and plans for the fence. The applicant expressed a willingness to work with the abutters on the latter and to include this agreement as a condition in the decision.

Libby Shaw commended the Planning Department, homeowners, and designers for not “canonizing the Greenway” which has occurred in other areas of the Charles River.

David Aitcheson, 66 Fayette St, proposed a carport for electrical access for EVs. The chair stated that this could not be mandated at this point.

The project team confirmed that there was no plan to remove any trees unless it was found to be hazardous or compromised.

Chair SantucciRozzi recognized the ongoing rodent concern, and the property owner agreed to support proactive management during construction.

Jeannie Johnston, 12 Green St asked for clarity about renovation plans. She was told to reach out to the owner after the meeting.

Before requesting a motion, Chair Santuccirozzi summarized the conditions and recommendations for approval. These included bike parking near porches and entrances of each unit; installation of pavers in those areas and near the bump out parking to serve as walkways; the six trees onsite would be preserved; the applicant would work with abutters to come to some agreement on replacement of the fence abutting the property at 184-186 Summer St; Although interior demolition did not trigger mandatory rodent abatement under the City’s code, the installation of bait boxes was recommended along with cessation of feeding activities.

Member Heep moved to allow the full two-story addition under new raised roof with an existing pre-existing non-conforming rear and side setbacks and to rebuild and reconfigure the existing parking areas with conditions noted in the staff report and additional conditions cited by Chair SantucciRozzi immediately prior to the motion. Motion was seconded by Member Girard. Motion was unanimously approved (5-0), with members Heep, Baker, Dale, Girard and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

4 Quincy St

Member Heep read the legal notice.

Kevin Castellanos, representing Paul Daniele Puritan Restoration, introduced the homeowners Kenneth Jaques and described the relief requested.

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Member Heep clarified if the dormers were replaced in kind or expanded.

Commenting on the community support submitted as part of the application, Member Odamah asked if there had been any concerns expressed. The petitioner explained that there was no opposition to the project.

After confirming that there were no public comments, and confirming the placement on the dormers on the plot plan, Chair SantucciRozzi requested a motion to approve the relief requested

Motion was made by Member Heep, seconded by Member Girard. Motion was unanimously approved (5-0), with members Heep, Baker, Dale, Girard and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

5-7 Bancroft St

Member Dale read the legal notice.

Petitioners Sarah and Eben Rauhut introduced the project and the rationale for relief sought. The renovations were proposed to create more living space. They also mentioned two letters of support from the neighbors.

Agent Brad Nederhoff provided an overview of the project.

Member Heep noted that the existing FAR overage was substantial and greater than typically requested.

Member Odamah asked if there were other similar projects in the neighborhood. The petitioners stated that there were other homes similar in style and scale.

Chair SantucciRozzi echoed Member Heep's concerns about the overage. Staff explained that under the Watertown Zoning Ordinance, FAR included the entire attic floor space once stairs were added, even if portions were under sloped ceilings. She noted that other nearby homes did not appear to have this scale and were all bungalows. She offered alternative solutions, including closing the back porch to gain space. Staff noted that while the rear yard setback offered some flexibility, expanding there would require review.

Chair SantucciRozzi offered the applicants the option to request a continuance.

Motion to continue the matter to May 28, 2025, was made by Member Baker, seconded by Member Heep. Motion was unanimously approved (5-0), with members Heep, Baker, Dale, Girard and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

237 Warren St

Member Heep read the legal notice.

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Kenneth Leitner, representing Frank and Lenore Smith and Scott and Haley MacKenzie provided an overview of the property including a historical context and how the project met the criteria for a variance.

Chair SantucciRozzi noted the difficult driveway layout, especially by modern car size standards.

Member Dale sought clarification on which driveway plan was the accurate/current proposal as there were two sets of documents.

Member Girard expressed his support for the request, stating that this was based on equity and value of allowing a family to live safely and functionally.

Member Baker confirmed that the proposed driveway plan removed a portion of the grass strip on the right side of the property to accommodate the second parking space. The applicants confirmed discussion/approval of this by abutting neighbors.

After further discussion, the Board asked the petitioners to return with more detailed drawings showing driveway, buffers and offsets as well as landscaping details.

Motion to continue the matter to May 28, 2025, was made by Member Baker, seconded by Member Heep. Motion was unanimously approved (5-0), with members Heep, Baker, Dale, Girard and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

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

The meeting ended at approximately 10:52 PM

MINUTES APPROVED:-----

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