

## WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: September 10, 2025, PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:03 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

PRESENT: Janet Buck, Chair; Payson Whitney; Jason Cohen; Sarah Scott; Abigail Hammett; Rachael Sack

Sameena Pirani, Principal Departmental Assistant; Gideon Schreiber, Director of Planning & Zoning; Matthew Neubacher, Planner.

### ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

#### Approval of Minutes:

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of 7/09/2025 meeting.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

Abigail Hammett abstained.

#### Request for Extension: 532/560 Pleasant St

Ted Saraceno of Saracen Properties requested a permit extension, citing unfavorable market conditions but reaffirming their commitment to redeveloping the site in coordination with the City of Watertown.

Chair Janet Buck acknowledged the public comments received from Council President Mark Sideris and Counselor Izzo suggesting the extension be limited to one year.

Janet Buck opened Board discussion.

Member Payson Whitney stated that economic conditions alone did not qualify as sufficient cause. He suggested a shorter extension with clearer accountability versus approving a long delay without results. Staff noted that state law may automatically extend the permit.

Member Rachael Sack requested a clear commitment to cleaning up or visually improving the property based on community feedback that it currently appeared blighted.

Board agreed to a one-year extension for the project, with conditions including an 8-month progress update, a formal maintenance plan of the site, and encouragement to explore interim or alternative site uses.

Motion to approve the request was made by Payson Whitney, seconded by Abigail Hammett.

VOTE 5-0 In Favor

## 62 Cottage St

Janet Buck read the legal notice.

Petitioner gave the rationale for the request. They clarified that the additions were not part of the approval. The current approval was for basement ADU use. Future additions would require zoning relief (ZBA) and separate building permits.

The Board was supportive of the ADU application. However, they discussed several broader concerns, including:

- Unnecessary complexity of the current ADU process, which includes public hearings—too burdensome for small, straightforward ADU projects
- With respect to this specific application, the Board noted that earlier submitted plans included proposed additions not under consideration in the current approval, potentially leading to misunderstandings about what was being approved. They also noted the areas that needed to be within a common area for access to shared utilities and to ensure the ADU remains within the allowable size limit. A condition was added to clearly indicate on the official plot plan that the two proposed additions are not included in the ADU approval under PZ-25-14.
- Need to modernize local ordinances to match state law to guide applicants of these small-scale projects—the Watertown Zoning Ordinance and Site Plan Review process were not designed with the new Massachusetts ADU law in mind
- Zoning interpretation issues for non-conforming lots. Undersized lots in the T-zone can now add an ADU under the new rules, giving more flexibility for homeowners.
- Parking clarification---no parking is required for ADUs due to proximity to transit.

Board voted to conditionally approve the application. A condition was added that the record copy of the approved plot plan shall have a note added to indicate that the two areas shown as proposed additions are not included in the ADU approval under PZ-25-14

Member Whitney motioned, and Member Cohen seconded, for Conditional Approval of the petitioner's request to install a protected use Accessory Dwelling Unit as it meets the requirements set forth in the Watertown Zoning Ordinance and in Massachusetts General Laws c. 40A, Section 3. The motion was approved 5-0, with Members Whitney, Cohen, Hammett, Sack and Chair Buck voting in favor.

## Staff Updates

- Zoning Updates: Work is ongoing on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) for City Council Review. General zoning review is in the development for fall 2025. Discussions include whether to integrate ADUs into this package or treat them separately
- Watertown is submitting its updated Open Space & Recreation Action Plan to the state to qualify for a new 10-year planning cycle under revised state guidelines
- Staff are working with Innes Land Strategies to develop the Revitalization Plan based on the vision outlined in the Watertown Square Area Plan. See also the Sept 2, 2025, Special City Council Meeting on the role of the City Council as a redevelopment authority in implementing the plan.
- Watertown has initiated an Affordable Housing Incentive Study with MAPC, with further updates and Planning Board input to come.
- Watertown is finalizing an ARPA-funded mobility study launched in the spring to analyze transportation opportunities, with a final draft and City Council presentation forthcoming.
- Watertown has completed its first professionally led Southside Historical Study since 1981, with a public presentation planned for October and hard copies available at the library and Parker Building.
- Watertown has scheduled community meetings for development projects at 108 Water St, 72 Mount Auburn St and 33 Mt Auburn St, including the City's first by right MBTA Communities Overlay project

Meeting adjourned 8:00PM

Meeting Minutes-----