

## WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: November 6, 2025, PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:03 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Janet Buck; Jason Cohen; Sarah Scott (remote); Abigail Hammett; Rachael Sack (remote)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Payson Whitney

STAFF PRESENT: Sameena Pirani, Principal Departmental Assistant; Gideon Schreiber, Director of Planning & Zoning; Matthew Neubacher, Planner; Hannah Jury, Administrative Specialist, Zoning.

Chair Janet Buck opened the meeting. At her request staff gave a brief overview of the ADU regulations and requirements, including the limits of the Board's review. Staff explained that the first five cases were accessory dwelling units (ADUs) legalized under state law, for review by the Planning Board through a simplified site plan process to confirm compliance with size, access, and zoning rules—without needing parking or zoning relief.

### **10 Coolidge**

Continued from October 8. Camilla Maruca, accompanied by Craig Kelley (Leonardi Aray Architects) and petitioner May Zhen, detailed the project, highlighting that there were no changes to the building's dimensional regulations. The proposed ADU would be 544 SF, less than 50% of the principal dwelling unit. It would include compliant egress, sleeping, cooking and sanitary facilities. A prior building permit had been issued for office-type use. The ADU law provided appropriate legal use, and the new application addressed prior issues such as lack of internal connection to the main dwelling.

Staff confirmed that some current ADU applications stem from enforcement actions on "illegal" units. Others, including this one, arose from previously permitted or semi-finished spaces being converted to ADUs. All new ADUs must meet current building code requirements, with specifics determined by the Building Commissioner. None of the units under review, including this one have been used as Air b & bs. A member commented that this process represented an effort to bring existing housing uses into compliance and incrementally improve housing affordability in Watertown and Massachusetts generally. Other members agreed that the application was straightforward and expressed no objections or additional comments.

No public comments were received.

Jason Cohen moved to allow conversion of a portion of the basement of an existing two-family dwelling into a protected use Accessory Dwelling Unit. Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. Vote 4-0 In Favor

### **216 Common ST**

Zhubin Shobeiri, 216 Common St, provided an overview of the project

Members discussed driveway striping as a safety measure. It was concluded that this should remain a suggestion, not a required condition, due to practical and spacing concerns. Egress window dimensions and safety were confirmed. The window was already installed and provided proper emergency access. There were no public comments. Jason Cohen made a motion to approve the request to convert a portion of the basement of a single-family structure to a protected use accessory dwelling unit. Motion was seconded by Abigail Hammett. Approved 4-0.

### **34 Walnut St**

Michael Lee, owner, said this was a three-family building with a fully built basement apartment. It was previously used as an in-law apartment for family members. The petitioner was seeking legal recognition of its use as an ADU. Features included full kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. It had two access points and an egress window in the bedroom, not sure about full code compliance. There were no questions from the Board, no public comments. Jason Cohen moved, seconded by Abigail Hammett. Motion approved 4-0.

### **885 Belmont St**

Bennie Ber, representing the petitioner Alex Sheh, provided an overview of the project to convert and slightly expand an existing detached garage into a one-bedroom dwelling unit (ADU) for the second-floor unit of the two-family home. The existing garage did not comply with zoning setbacks, as the rear property line was approximately 3 ft rather than the required 5 ft—any necessary rebuilding during renovation would meet zoning requirements, with minor adjustments preserving the proposed ADU layout and square footage. The Board noted that there was sufficient parking and driveway access for the existing units. The project was viewed positively as an example of converting underutilized space into an ADU, consistent with City's goals.

Motion to approve the petition was made by Jason Cohen, seconded by Abigail Hammett. Motion was approved 4-0.

The four participating members took a retroactive vote by roll call to formally document their approval of the site plan review projects heard this evening.

### **61 Oakley Rd**

Amit Schigli, SH Property Solutions, gave a project overview—to renovate an unfinished basement to create an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) including kitchen, egress windows compliant with building codes, and two potential access points.

Doreen Dawson, 36 Arden Rd, expressed concerns about parking---the addition of an ADU would increase parking demand on Oakley Rd, a small street with limited space. Staff said that state law prohibits Watertown from requiring additional parking for ADUs. There was no legal requirement for owners to notify renters about the parking situation or winter parking bans.

Staff said that parking could not be mandated for ADUs, but disclosure could be suggested.

A neighbor located at 57 Oakley Rd confirmed that the path to access the back door did not conflict with their property; staff confirmed space was sufficient, zoning would be checked during permitting and door placement was flexible.

Motion was approved by Jason Cohen, seconded by Abigail Hammett. Motion was approved 4-0 by roll call vote.

### **25 Clarendon St**

Mark Beaudry, (from Civilworks New England, representing Comcast) gave a project overview and highlighted site changes. Representatives of Comcast attended remotely. Formerly used for biotech and fitness businesses, the building would be converted to a telecommunications and data facility supporting broadband and 911 services. No exterior changes were proposed. He stated that all work would be inside. Site improvements include increasing open space exceeding zoning requirements, adding new landscaping between the building and Clarendon Street and coordinating tree and understory plantings with city staff, including Conservation Agent Katie Swan to ensure consistency with Conservation Commission approvals. Comcast will also construct a new sidewalk along its Clarendon St frontage and connect it to the building with an accessible walkway. Stormwater management will be improved with a new treatment unit and added permeable surfaces. The project, as approved by the Conservation Commission, will reduce runoff and improve water quality. A hospital grade generator and additional rooftop cooling units designed for low noise would operate, with a noise study to confirm compliance. Only four parking spaces, including one accessible space, were proposed, reflecting the site's low traffic impact.

Mark Beaudry confirmed that they had already proposed a small, landscaped island near the driveway entrance, which would add green space and define the parking area. He supported the idea of adding trees or other plantings in the new green space between the building and Clarendon Street, noting this would be coordinated with the city's staff. He also clarified that Comcast was leasing only the 25 Clarendon building, not the other two buildings on the same property, so it would not be appropriate or feasible for them to build sidewalks beyond their lease area.

Staff and the petitioner explained that the rooftop condensers and generator were high-end low noise units, with sound levels well below city limits. A noise study will be required after installation to confirm compliance, and the building's parapet and equipment placement will help screen and muffle sound from public view and nearby properties.

Sarah Scott urged the team to add more trees and visually appealing landscaping along Clarendon Street, emphasizing opportunities for large tree growth and seasonal or pollinator friendly plantings to enhance streetscape and ensure consistency with the Conservation Commission approval. The planting plan shall be maintained for the life of the approval.

Chair confirmed that there were no public comments.

Jason Cohen moved to approve the site plan for Comcast's broadband facility, adding a condition to incorporate landscaping guidance. The Petitioner shall submit a landscape plan and any future amendments to the Conservation Commission and the Director of Planning and Zoning for review and approval. The landscaping plan should consider larger tree species with pollinator friendly plantings to enhance streetscape and ensure consistency with the Conservation Commission's approvals. Motion was seconded by Abigail Hammette and approved unanimously (5-0) by roll call vote.

### **108 Water St**

Chair Buck stated that the Zoning Board of Appeals would be the permit granting authority in this petition. The Planning Board would make an advisory recommendation to them.

Julian Lewis, Eaglebrook Capital, introduced himself and members of his team, summarizing the public engagement, city review process, and early-stage approvals work. His presentation included an overview of the project's physical characteristics, housing mix, sustainability features, transit access and professional team, before handing it over to Alex Brownell, project architect from PCA.

Following his presentation, Alex Brownell, project architect from PCA, presented the site context, proposed plans, project design, materials, massing and sustainability aspects.

Jeff Dirk from Vanasse & Associates Inc explained that the project was designed to minimize car use and integrate into Watertown's multimodal transit network. There would be new street improvements, reduced parking and incentives like transit passes and bike-share benefits.

Erik Schoumaker (Mckenzie Engineering Group) explained on-site parking, proposed stormwater management system, which includes catch basins, pretreatment, and subsurface infiltration systems that meet local and state stormwater standards, improving runoff quality and adding landscaped areas. Utilities would be entirely replaced and upgraded, and the team would file an RDA with the Conservation Commission for minor work within the 200-ft riverfront buffer.

Landscape Architect Mike D'Angelo outlined the site's new pedestrian-focused landscape design, introducing a 12.5-foot wide sidewalk with street trees, bike racks, benches and streetlights. The plan would add planting zones and patio spaces around the building, screening for utilities, and evergreen buffers with fencing for privacy of rear units and neighbors.

Staff reviewed the standard conditions of approval including utilities, final landscaping, mitigating privacy and light impacts on abutting residential properties, possibly by limiting rooftop terrace size or lighting. They noted that the affordable unit mix was supported by the Affordable Housing Trust. Also, that the Planning Board was only giving a recommendation, the Zoning Board of Appeals would be the Permit Granting Authority.

Applicants said that they were leaning towards making the units condominiums—including affordable units sold through a lottery—but the building was being designed to meet code for either condos or rentals. They were advised to structure the Affordable Housing Agreement to preserve that flexibility.

Abigail Hammet expressed strong support for the project while raising questions about trash collection, operations, accessibility for lower units, protecting neighboring trees during wall work, how rear patios meet setback rules, details and design of the rear fence, clarification of the building's final brick/ material selection. She suggested sensitivity to abutters, a collaboratively designed sturdier rear fence, and more robust landscaping to preserve privacy and soften views. She recommended a less stark, more consistent palette on the rear facade. She suggested dedicating the extra parking space to a shared car for residents, similar to a Zipcar but managed by the building itself. There was consensus to allow—versus mandate—a car share space as part of the projects parking allocation, providing flexibility whether the building becomes rental or condo.

Jason Cohen also supported the project. He commended the skillful response to a complex, sloped site, the brick detailing and supported the prior comment to tone down

the rear facade materials to soften the building's presence along Hunt Street. He questioned the placement of the delivery and rideshare pull off area, noting it was somewhat distant from the lobby but ultimately agreed it was a reasonable solution to avoid double parking on narrow Water St, especially given its depth and basement elevator access for move-ins.

Members noted that deliveries and rideshares may block the building entrance due to unclear access and narrow street conditions. This could be prevented by adding wayfinding signage and physical barriers near the entrance while keeping designated delivery area lower on site where the slope allows safer pull offs.

Sarah Scott asked whether the Affordable unit mix met Watertown's housing needs and provided sufficient family-sized Affordable units. The developer said that the balance mix was intentional and approved by the Affordable Housing Trust. She also expressed concerns about the convenience and accessibility of the rear garage bike storage due to potential conflicts with vehicle circulation. It was clarified that there were three bike storage options. The back location in the garage was more of a caged bike area while the front was a full bike room. E-bike charging power and long-term bike parking standards would be provided.

In responses to Rachael Sack's concerns regarding privacy for abutting neighbors, staff said that the developers had respected neighbors by providing 20-ft rear setback. Also, the triangular, unconventional building footprint and resulting irregular shapes and hallways limited the ability to include more 3 or 2-bedroom units.

Jason Cohen made a motion for the Planning Board to recommend that the Zoning Board of Appeals grant conditional approval of the special permit with site plan review for the 52-unit multifamily housing development, with the listed conditions, with the possibility of an additional condition allowing one parking space to optionally be designated as a car-share space at the petitioner's discretion. Abigail seconded. Roll call vote 5-0.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS**

### **Approval of Minutes:**

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of 9/10/2025 meeting.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In Favor (Jason Cohen, Abigail Hammett, Rachael Sack & Sarah Scott)