



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, November 19, 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 M. SantucciRozzi, *Chair*; David Ferris, *Member*; Christopher H. Heep, *Member*; Alexander Dale, *Member*; Sarah Baker, *Member*; Samuel Odamah, *Alternate*; Gregory Girard, *Alternate*.

Absent Members: none.

Staff present (in-person): Gideon Schreiber, *Director of Planning and Zoning*; Will Downie, *Senior Planner - Housing*; Hannah Jury, *Administrative Specialist - Zoning*.

Staff present (remote): Antonio Mancini, *Zoning Enforcement Officer*

Chair Melissa M. SantucciRozzi opened the meeting at approximately 7:00pm. She introduced staff, noted the members in attendance, and reviewed the agenda.

Administrative Business:

A. October 22, 2025 Meeting Minutes

The motion to approve the October 22, 2025 meeting minutes was made by Member Ferris, seconded by Member Dale. The motion was approved 5-0 with Members Ferris, Dale, Baker, Heep, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

B. 104 Main St:

Staff introduced the request for a proposed modification to the approved Affordable Housing Plan. The proposed modification was recommended by the Affordable Housing Trust. Brett Buehrer of O'Connor Capital Partners provided a status update to the project: The leasing office will likely open in May or June, and there is a dialogue with a potential retail partner. Mr. Buehrer explained that the current state of the market led to the decision to allow for more flexibility by making the units rental rather than ownership. Mr. Buehrer concluded his presentation with two points: (1) Request for approval by the Board to change

the affordable unit from the originally designated three-bedroom townhouse unit to a flat three-bedroom unit; (2) Statement that the townhouse units may be rental as well, but communication and approval with the bank is required to decide on this.

Chair SantucciRozzi inquired about the meeting with the Affordable Housing Trust (“the Trust”). Mr. Buehrer confirmed that the Trust was informed that the townhome condo units may be rental rather than ownership, which was supported by the Trust. Member Heep stated that one of the five townhouse units should be affordable, and if the petitioner’s rationale is only flexibility for the developer, he is not in support. Member Ferris commented that the floor plan for the flat three-bedroom unit would be more adaptable to serve diverse mobility needs and family-style living than the townhome units, which are not required to comply with accessibility regulations. Chair SantucciRozzi clarified that no public comments will be heard for the minor modification. Chair SantucciRozzi voiced the concern that Watertown lacks opportunities for purchasing affordable units, however it is not under the purview of the Zoning Board to determine whether it is ownership or rental; if all units will be rental, the location of the affordable unit may move/float.

Member Dale asked whether the Board may condition that the unit can only move from the townhome if all units become rental, to which the Chair replied they cannot. Staff clarified that the Trust confirmed that an ownership townhome unit is not a better affordable housing unit than the rental three-bedroom unit.

Staff read the relevant condition no. 19a of the original decision at the Board’s request.

Chair SantucciRozzi contemplated possibilities with Mr. Buehrer. It may be that if the affordable units are floating, and all units are rental, one of the townhomes may eventually contain an affordable unit. Member Ferris restated the motion, and Member Dale seconded, the motion to approve the request for a minor modification of condition no.19a in decision no. ZBA-2023-02 SP/SR/SPF to relocate a three-bedroom affordable unit from an existing townhouse to a flat within the primary building. The motion passed 4-1 with Members Dale, Baker, Ferris, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor, and Member Heep voting against.

Cases:

114 Marshall St

Member Ferris read the legal notice. Petitioners Chris and Wilson Lowry introduced themselves, and their attorney Steve Winnick, who presented a statement remotely. Mr. Winnick explained the facts of the property, preexisting nonconformities, and the scope of the project, which proposes two small additions that he argues are *de minimus*. He concludes with a request for the Board to approve that all conditions for a Special Permit Finding are met in accordance with the Watertown Zoning Ordinance.

Member Ferris confirmed that clapboard wood siding, which was the original siding of the historic house, is intended for the project. He continued to state that the ‘box bay,’ extending from the living room is the only visible addition from the street. Member Ferris asked if the area where the wall meets the roof will align with where the porch meets the roof to ensure a somewhat similar profile, to which Chris Lowry confirmed that it will. Chris Lowry also discussed the status of replacing the windows of the house. The windows on the front will be replaced during this renovation, the side windows and some on the back

were replaced 5 to 6 years ago. After a discovery 18 years ago, the petitioners clarified that they decided to ensure all windows on the second floor would be a two-over-one form in keeping with the historic style. Member Ferris recommended that the exposed foundation have a parged application that is a color similar to stone as opposed to a fake veneer.

Chris Lowry confirmed with Chair SantucciRozzi that when they purchased the house it was a two-family dwelling, but has since been converted back to single-family, and there is no kitchen on the second floor.

Member Baker clarified that the long-term intention is to match dormers and additions with clapboard siding. Member Dale asked at what phase of the project they realized zoning relief would be required, to which Chris Lowry stated that when they commissioned a plot plan the lot lines and nonconformities became clear.

Member Odamah asked whether additional challenges or concerns may be anticipated. Chris Lowry stated that the process of removing the stucco and installing proper installation has helped the process move along smoothly. Chris Lowry confirmed the support of neighbors with Member Odamah.

Chair SantucciRozzi agreed that the additions are *de minimus* and listed the two letters of support. Member Ferris motioned and Member Heep seconded to approve the request for a Special Permit Finding to allow the construction of two additions within nonconforming side-yard setback and building coverage. The motion was passed 5-0 with Members Dale, Baker, Heep, Ferris, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

108 Water St

Member Ferris read the legal notice and Chair SantucciRozzi stated for the record that while she is not a party of interest under Massachusetts General Law, she received an extended abutter's notification and confirms her ability to hear the case without bias. Julian Lewis of Eaglebrook Capital began the presentation on behalf of WSQ Development LLC, noting unanimous recommendation from the Planning Board and commended the city for the upzoning of Watertown Square. Mr. Lewis reviewed the process of their proposal thus far, including input from Staff, City Councilors, Community Meetings, and a peer design review. Mr. Lewis provided an overview of the plans for the site and introduced members of the project team including Attorney Bill York, Architect Alex Brownell of PCA Associates, Civil Engineer Erik Schoumaker of Mckenzie Engineering, and Traffic Engineer Jeffrey Dirk from Vanasse and Associates, and Landscape Architect Michael D'Angelo of MDLA.

Alex Brownell reviewed the site plans, floor plans, and surveys, noting the lack of vegetation, surrounding land use, and unique existing site characteristics in grade change. Significant improvements to the site were mentioned, including increasing landscaping and burying power and utility lines. Some elements within the property including a retaining wall and portions of spaces used as backyard by abutters were maintained in the plans. Mr. Brownell presented renderings, elevations, and sections to emphasize materials, design considerations, and the proposed building's screening from surrounding uses. He continued by reviewing sustainability metrics, including PHIUS principles, LEED Gold certification, solar, electric, and stormwater plans.

Jeffrey Dirk, Transportation Consultant, reviewed the site's location within larger transit operations. The transportation study concluded that the proposed residential use would generate about half the amount of traffic as an occupied office use. The office building is currently largely vacant, and Vanasse and

Associates did not complete counts for the current use. Mr. Dirk highlighted challenges in grade change, sidewalk conditions, and improving transit-oriented connectivity from the site to the multiple bus lines within walking distance on Galen St and Watertown Square. The project slated for development on 99 Water St. had agreed to future expanded sidewalk and connectivity improvements on the west side of Water St. 108 Water will collaborate with the Department of Public Works and 99 Water to improve pedestrian mobility. The future plans proposing a T-intersection were shown to contextualize the traffic discussion within the changes planned to the west side of Water St pending development of 99 Water. These future changes off-site may facilitate safe pick-up and drop-off heading towards the intersection at Nonantum Rd. Bicycle parking spaces and bike share options provided by the developer were reviewed.

Erik Schoumaker reviewed the Site Layout Plan with the building footprint, overhang, parking spaces, a modified curb cut in the driveway, and reuse of existing curb cut into the basement-level parking garage. Dimensional and parking regulations comply with Watertown Square 2 Zoning, and plans are ADA compliant. Pedestrian, mobility, and landscaping improvements along Water St were noted. Mr. Schoumaker explained the previous nonconforming stormwater drainage system on the site and plans to meet Massachusetts Stormwater Standards.

Mike D'Angelo concluded the presentation with the Landscape Concept Plan and reference imagery for street trees, vegetation, and patio spaces.

Mr. Lewis reviewed details about the southeastern limits of the property. A piece of land behind a retaining wall is part of the 108 Water property, however the desire to maintain a portion of the existing retaining wall and allow the use of this land by adjacent property on Hunt St prompted the project's decision to not develop that portion of land. Mr. Brownell responded to design questions about unit typologies within the unusual characteristics of the site.

Member Dale noted the unique mix of unit types and shapes, but a lack of larger units with only one three-bedroom unit. Mr. Lewis stated that the below average size of the units may lead to more affordable options, and while they experimented with different unit types, economic and spatial considerations led to their final floor plans and unit mix. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Brownell responded to questions about the federal Investment Tax Credit (ITC) for solar energy, and whether the project may have sufficient time to claim benefits. Mr. Schoumaker detailed the catch basins and maintenance plans for the infiltration system.

Member Baker asked whether reducing the lobby-level mailroom and common areas to allow for an additional studio unit was considered. Mr. Brownell stated the mailroom and common areas are sized appropriately in the lobby. Member Baker noted an opportunity for an external door on upper level for easier bike access. Mr. Brownell responded to maintenance and material questions about landscaping on the back wall, that it would be the building's responsibility to maintain. Member Baker called attention to a lack of vertical division details between unit patios on the top floor, and that aesthetic considerations should be made for any changes or additions to divide the units. Member Baker raised concerns for the East elevation which would face the Charles River bike path, stating it will receive significant foot and bicyclist traffic from the bike path but is less dynamic and attractive than other facades. Mr. Lewis spoke on the rodent mitigation plan for construction. Mr. D'Angelo detailed the species and characteristics of plants and trees and maintenance plans for the patio. Mr. Dirk and Mr. Lewis responded to questions concerning the Transportation Development Management (TDM) Plan. Member Baker suggested that

increasing the number of MBTA passes to match the number of bedrooms, rather than units, and providing them not just upon request, would improve the transit-oriented development goals.

Mr. Dirk and Staff clarified details regarding a planned reconfiguration for intersections and crosswalks impacting Nonantum Rd., Water St., and Galen St. Mr. Dirk clarified the role of this site specifically in improving pedestrian and cyclist circulation between the site, the Charles River Reservation Areas, Water St, and Nonantum Rd. Staff stated the planned reconfigurations combine private, DCR, DPW, and MBTA jurisdictions, and an interim condition is being developed to connect the site to Galen St. and lower Water St. in collaboration with nearby property owners. Member Baker stated traffic safety concerns and noted potential street blocking in the short-term and delivery parking spots.

Member Heep clarified with Staff the use of short-term and delivery parking spots, noting that typically delivery spaces would be accommodated within the larger lot and not protrude into the right of way. Mr. Schoumaker explained the limit of the curb on the plans is the existing travel way, and the sidewalk and short-term parking spaces are partially within the property. Staff clarified offsite right-of-way parking and loading would require traffic commission approval. The relief requested before the Board is only because it is not in a by-right overlay district; all zoning requirements are met and no relief for parking is requested.

Member Ferris clarified the location of the garage door and the location of the fence along the properties on Hunt St. Member Ferris suggested delegating screening between patios on the top floor to the design and landscaping team. He commended the presentation and design of the project, proposed materials, thoughtful angulation of the river-facing façade. Member Ferris concluded that the proposal would yield a positive transformation for the site.

Member Girard critiqued the south façade, stating a lack of visual interest for the abutters on Hunt St. Mr. Brownell clarified the façade was intentionally subdued and designed to complement surrounding residences in scale and material. Member Ferris stated that the choice of materials is appropriate and ideal for the residential context; overlapping panels will engage dynamic shadowing and animate the façade. Attorney York noted the design was advised and approved by Architect David Gamble in the design peer review process. Mr. Brownell discussed the privacy and screening measures taken for neighbors on Hunt St. Member Girard raised concerns with the view from the top-floor windows and patios into backyards on Hunt St, to which Mr. Lewis confirmed the size of the patios was reduced in response to abutting comments. In response to bicycle parking concerns, Mr. Lewis noted the bicycle storage area interior to the parking garage was expanded after Planning Board comments, and the first-floor bicycle storage area will explore the option of adding/moving the door.

Mr. Dirk detailed possible routes from the site to the Massachusetts Turnpike. Mr. Dirk conceded that while some traffic will be exacerbated, drivers will likely learn the path of least resistance and behaviors will shift to accommodate traffic. Mr. Dirk confirmed that the reduced parking supply on-site and on-street, expanded amenities for transit, walkability, and cycling, and residential use constrains demand and potential for increased traffic. Member Girard supported a formal condition for the distribution of MBTA passes based on number of bedrooms in each unit and the passes should be valid for longer than one month. Staff clarified that if the MBTA passes are conditioned, it must be stated as an amendment to the TDM Plan previously approved by staff. Member Girard questioned whether annual residential monitoring of parking and annual counts are frequent enough. Mr. Dirk confirmed that snapshots are sufficient when complemented by night-time monitoring as the residential population is not transient. Staff clarified that the TDM is separate from jurisdiction of the Zoning Board of Appeals. Member Girard continued by asking

how spillover parking into neighboring streets will be monitored. Mr. Lewis responded by stating they will obtain vehicle information from all residents and supply this to local authorities and the condo association. If a resident's vehicle is identified parking on neighboring streets, the condo association will issue a fine.

Chair SantucciRozzi requested clarification on the southeast corner of the property. Mr. Lewis specified the extent of 108 Water St.'s property, the triangle that belongs to 40 Hunt St, and the areas that are 26 and 28 Hunt St. The southeastern corner of the property was kept as is for to neighbors and to retain trees. Chair SantucciRozzi noted the triangle of land owned by 40 Hunt St indicates that 28 Hunt St is not a direct abutter. The Chair addressed a flaw in the logic of reducing the amount of space for a multi-family residence to appease one resident that is not contiguous to their property. Mr. Lewis stated that a license would be granted rather than an easement, and while a measure of goodwill, Staff, Attorney Bill York, and Mr. Brownell clarified that the retaining wall, grade change, and location of a mature tree canopy also contributed to the decision to not develop that area. Chair SantucciRozzi continued that if the resident on 28 Hunt St does not have a license or easement from 40 Hunt St, they actually do not have legal means to access the rest of the yard owned by 108 Water St, even if a license is granted. Mr. Brownell explained plans for screening rooftop mechanicals, that a parapet and inset mechanicals will provide adequate screening, however they have not yet planned and designed the mechanical system, so their plans are not shown. The Chair noted the dilapidated status of Water St, and that it should be repaved. Mr. Lewis confirmed it will likely be repaved in collaboration with Eversource work. Mr. Lewis explained plans for collaborating with abutting properties for construction staging and parking within the constrained site. Erik clarified details for the barriers of the infiltration system. Chair SantucciRozzi critiqued the treatment of the first-floor garage exterior as seen in the rendering from of the corner from Water St West. The Chair explained that a disconnect between the street and the building would create a hostile pedestrian experience. Mr. Brownell stated the location of utilities and prioritization of the corner visible from Galen St led to this design.

Member Ferris asked whether plantings could be added to the corner, to which they cannot, and suggested increasing the width of the window, the width of the balcony above, an applied metal trellis, a Juliette balcony, or brick patterning may increase visual interest in the corner. Chair SantucciRozzi affirmed that the concern with the corner is not in the material, but the height of the uninterrupted wall. Member Ferris stated light fixtures may break up the wall. While discussing options for the corner, Staff clarified the sidewalk terminates but the long-range plans are for it to continue, and Mr. Brownell noted an interim crosswalk would be installed and connect to the sidewalk.

Chair SantucciRozzi asked about how parking spaces are distributed, and Mr. Lewis stated more than one parking space would not be sold to each unit and once the space is bought it cannot be rented out. Staff stated that the repaving of Water St. is not currently in the conditions, and DPW would determine the amount that needs to be repaved. A condition to repave upper Water Street would be added to the transportation section. Staff noted numbering errors in the conditions and that these would be fixed. Chair SantucciRozzi asked about on-street parking, to which Mr. Lewis responded only the two spots at the bottom of Water St. Staff stated that there is a possibility for DPW and the City to review possibilities for on-street parking, but it would be difficult with the grade change. The Chair requested the City take a closer look into options for on-street parking. Mr. Lewis showed plans for 99 Water St., which indicates 8 spaces on New Water St. Staff clarified zoning requirements and widths of the sidewalk and planter strip.

Member Dale asked whether residents can park e-bikes in the interior spaces, to which Mr. Lewis responded they can. Member Dale inquired about the possibility of collaborating with the MBTA for use of commuter lot spaces. Mr. Lewis explained that collaboration with the MBTA for use of spaces in the commuter lot is unlikely.

Chair SantucciRozzi requested public comments. Ari Stern of 16 Hunt St. stated he did not understand how traffic can be reduced. The current use, while never fully occupied, only has 30 parking spaces and the proposed residence will reduce the supply by only three spaces. Mr. Stern challenged the accuracy of the traffic study and supports conditioning MBTA passes and exploration of off-street parking. Chair SantucciRozzi explained the validity of the methods and checks made to ensure accuracy of the traffic study. Parker Wells of 16 Hunt St., and employed at 44 Hunt St., stated he estimates 20-30 cars at peak morning hours enter the lot of 44 Hunt St from Water St., and worries the number of cars may double. Mr. Wells asked whether the retaining wall along Hunt St., is staying, to which it is.

Ruth Rappaport of 28 Hunt St. identified herself as the current resident who makes use of the rear corner of the lot discussed previously and requested time to discuss the backyard area with a lawyer. She explained that she believes the requirements for adverse possession are met. Ms. Rappaport stated that the demand for cars may be higher than is discussed. She cautioned about accidents at the intersection of Nonantum Rd. and Water St., suggesting a safety light for a crosswalk. Ms. Rappaport requested that no patios overlook the rear properties of Hunt St due to noise with open windows in the summertime. Chair SantucciRozzi read a letter from Eric Gsell of Eliot St., which outlined concerns for increased traffic. The Chair read a letter from Sam Ghilardi of 22 Springfield St. on behalf of Housing for all Watertown Steering Committee, which expressed support for the development.

Member Girard noted how the rear setback and stepped back top-floor adequately separates the proposed structure from the properties along Hunt St.

Chair SantucciRozzi got confirmation from the Petitioner and Board Members that the hearing will continue to the next meeting. Staff agreed to prepare draft conditions for the next hearing on December 17th. Chair SantucciRozzi and Member Girard suggested the applicant prepare precedent photos and provide multiple options for design changes.

Member Heep motioned, and Member Dale seconded to continue the hearing of 108 Water Street to the December 17th, 2025 ZBA meeting. The motion passed 5-0 with Members Heep, Dale, Ferris, Baker, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

Member Ferris motioned, and Member Heep seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 with Members Heep, Dale, Ferris, Baker, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor. The meeting closed at approximately 10:37 p.m..

MINUTES APPROVED:-----