



CITY OF WATERTOWN
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
PARKER BUILDING, 124 WATERTOWN ST.
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

PRESENT:

MEMBERS- Christopher H. Heep, *Acting Chair*; David Ferris; Alexander Dale; Sarah Baker; Samuel Odamah, *Alternate Member (Voting)*.

STAFF- Gideon Schreiber, *Director of Planning and Zoning*; William Downie, *Senior Planner – Housing*; Matthew Neubacher, *Planner*; Hannah Jury, *Administrative Specialist – Zoning*.

PRESENT, REMOTE:

MEMBERS- Gregory Girard, *Alternate Member*.

STAFF- Antonio Mancini, *Zoning Enforcement Officer*

ABSENT:

MEMBERS- Melissa M. SantucciRozzi, *Chair*.

On Wednesday evening, February 25, 2026, 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.

Acting Chair Christopher H. Heep opened the meeting at approximately 7:00pm. He introduced staff, noted the members in attendance, and reviewed the agenda.

1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

A. APPROVAL OF JANUARY MINUTES

VOTE

The motion to approve January 28, 2026, meeting minutes was made by Member Ferris and seconded by Member Dale. The motion was approved 5-0 in a roll call vote with Member(s) Ferris, Dale, Baker, Heep, Alternate Member Odamah, and Chair Heep voting in favor.

2. CASES

A. 108 CALIFORNIA STREET

Chair Heep reopened the public hearing for 108 California St.

PRESENTATION

Architect Patricia Welbourn showed changes made to the west elevation and confirmed that all windows and frames will be replaced, siding material will be hardy plank. She noted additional details provided for the gambrel roof eave and height added to the roofline for privacy on the top-floor deck. She proceeded to review internal changes to the floor plans and stairways and adjustments to add a common means of egress to the side deck from

both units. Welbourn noted arborvitaes will be introduced to landscaping and the front side of the chain link fence will be replaced.

BOARD INQUIRY

Architect Welbourn replied the ADU size on the first floor decreased slightly (to 833 SF) for Chair Heep.

Member Ferris expressed appreciation for the updates and discussed that it would be appropriate to remove the top center window which corresponds with a closet. Member Ferris clarified seemingly inconsistent sizes of windows between elevations and floor plans. In referencing the front and side elevations, he requested updated drawings to ensure that the sections of the main house that read as dormers are depicted accordingly and more prominent than sections that are setback. Adjustments may be made on the side elevation on ZBA.5 and ZBA.6 to bring the piece of trim—the rake—closer to the body of the dormer and accurately reflecting the bend of the gambrel.

Member Dale noted the window alignment on the first floor and asked whether the change makes the windows too high on the interior. Architect Welbourn affirmed the importance of aligning headers and noted the windows may be lengthened.

Member Baker clarified if the top floor is correctly labeled as an attic, to which Architect Welbourn replied it will be used for potential storage and flexible living space rather than a closed bedroom.

Chair Heep suggested the Architect correct the plans for an error on ZBA.01 and to only remove and replace the front side of the chain link fence. Staff noted the current language for consistent materials and siding is sufficient for a single-family residential project, and the Board agreed that a note be added to the decision to address changes to drawings prior to construction to ensure integrity of the gambrel.

VOTE

Member Ferris motioned, and Member Dale seconded the motion to approve the request for Special Permit Finding to construct a 1.5 story addition and porch roof within front and side setbacks and required distance between structures. The motion was approved 4-0 with Member(s) Ferris, Dale, Baker, and Chair Heep voting in favor.

B. 72 MOUNT AUBURN STREET

Chair Heep reopened the public hearing for 72 Mt Auburn St at approximately 7:25 p.m. and Member Ferris read the legal notice.

PRESENTATION

Attorney Terrence Morris introduced himself and the Architect, Bennie Ber. Mr. Morris reviewed the regulatory path involving reviews by the Historic District Commission, community members, the Planning Board, Affordable Housing Trust, and now the Zoning Board of Appeals. Mr. Morris reviewed the factors which informed different iterations of the design: relationship to historic structure, zoning conformance, transitional building style, consistency with neighborhood and design for two street frontages. The current design was then presented as intentionally modern and massed to emphasize the historic structure. While the historic and proposed structure appear distinct, for purposes of permitting and zoning, they are considered a single building.

Mr. Morris reviewed the changes made after engaging with community members: more area for plantings and improved landscaping, increasing visual interest with bay projections and shadowing, and a brick veneer on the

foundation. He emphasized the deliberate contrast between the structures, that the proposed structure is setback and intended to provide a backdrop for the historic structure. Mr. Morris provided a list of façade materials and building orientation within the unique lot. The proposed structure will have one façade aligned with Summer St and the rest of the building aligned with the historic structure, although set back further than the historic structure from Mt Auburn St. He reviewed plans for the garage: a recessed garage door, a central stair providing interior access from the building to car and bicycle parking, and access to trash areas. He closed by reviewing how the project complies with dimensional regulations for the WSQ2 zoning district.

BOARD INQUIRY

MEMBER FERRIS - At 7:50 p.m., Member Ferris began his questions for the applicant by asking if the rear portion of the garage is a trellis, raising concerns for snow accumulation. Mr. Ber responded that this opening was for ventilation and maneuverability. Member Ferris referenced plan AS 102, asking whether an area on the wall along parking spots 1, 2, and 3 may be fenestrated for ventilation. Mr. Ber stated that those parking spaces facing the rear yard are not enclosed with a wall but open to the rear yard with a guardrail. Mr. Ber stated that if final calculations of ventilation requirements deem the roof opening unnecessary, it will be built with a complete roof. Mr. Ber clarified that there is a recessed garage door along Summer St. Member Ferris clarified that the rear wall of the garage, below the potential trellis for ventilation, is louvered and trash and recycling is interior to the garage. Mr. Ber also confirmed for Member Ferris that the existing ramp along the historic house is to be removed and plantings will be put in place, although this is not reflected in plans.

Attorney Morris returned to clarify the process with the Historical District Commission (HDC), that elements of massing, height, and main features of the project were previously approved by the HDC after deliberation some months ago. Hearings with the HDC preceded discretionary review and approval by the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, to which changes to the proposal are to be expected, and the project will return to the HDC for final approval. Staff explained that the HDC reviewed general details of the project, but fine-grained details considering the commercial to residential conversion of the historic structure have not yet been reviewed, meaning the fire escape and changes to exterior doors are subject to HDC approval.

Member Ferris verified that, to the Architect's knowledge, the single-stair egress is compliant with Building Code. Mr. Ber agreed with Member Ferris that pushing back the trellis between the structures from the front façade would improve visibility and respect for the historic structure. Member Ferris stated that the current siding appears to be flushed panels and asked whether there will be shadow lines or recesses between panels. After Mr. Ber explained the dimensions of the panels, Member Ferris concluded that renderings do not sufficiently depict horizontal or vertical coursing. Mr. Ber explained that while a roof deck has not been designed, parapets will be constructed to allow for future development of a roof deck or terrace. Mr. Ber addressed exterior treatment of mechanicals and ventilation by stating the preference is to direct vents and outlets vertically to the roof. Member Ferris cautioned that an uneven ratio between façade size and articulation of materials risks the building reading like a box. He concluded that photos of how the materials will look would be beneficial.

MEMBER DALE - Member Dale asked how many electric vehicle (EV) charging parking spaces are proposed. Mr. Ber stated three are designed, and electrical design has not progressed to know capacity of transformers to wire all spaces. Solar panel installation has been discussed but not designed, and the building is proposed to be all electric. Staff confirmed the building is a combined structure for zoning purposes, attached below grade. Mr. Ber emphasized the difficulty navigating both WSQ 2 zoning and historic district review.

MEMBER BAKER - Member Baker requested additional details to view the siding and visuals for the back building from all street angles. She confirmed trees on the landscape plan that were not clear in all renderings and that a closet on a floor plan is enclosed. Mr. Ber explained the uses of each room in the garage: water and sprinkler, trash and recycling, electrical closet, etc. Mr. Ber confirmed cars will not back out of the garage into Summer St., and Member Baker requested turning radii and increased clarity for vehicle circulation. Mr. Ber clarified ADA compliance for units and space reserved for elevators on the plans, and a linen closet on all floors. Member Baker noted a perceived lack of harmony between exterior materials, colors, visual interest, and that the historic structure is overwhelmed by the massing of the proposed structure. She concluded that the renderings have distortions with colors and trees, suggested a more dynamic right façade, and that the proposal considers a green wall.

ALTERNATE MEMBER ODAMAH - Mr. Ber clarified that the project does not intend to touch the existing building, aiming for as minimal an impact on the historic structure as possible, and the connection between the buildings will happen where a stair from the proposed structure has a landing at the basement of the historic structure. Mr. Ber and Attorney Morris expressed frustration with the approval process, emphasizing that the three levels of discretionary approval have what they perceive to be an excessive level of design review and conflicting preferences for approval of the design. Member Odamah inquired about the relation of the building within the neighborhood, and Mr. Ber explained that the proposed addition is singular and compatible with planned development patterns for the area and is respectful in preserving the integrity of the historic structure.

CHAIR HEEP - Mr. Ber stated that the trash is stored in the garage and the units will be for sale as condos for ownership. Chair Heep commented that the approach for contrast may be diminishing the prominence of the historic structure. Member Ferris responded that the intention behind contrast is that the historic building maintains its integrity, to have new structures be complementary but different.

FINAL DELIBERATIONS

Member Ferris clarified the Board's comments, that a more complementary proposal would be beneficial. Member Ferris closed by requesting further explanation and possible adjustments to plans for appearance of materials and colors rather than roof shape or changes to form. Chair Heep clarified for Attorney Morris that the Board's requested adjustments have less to do with form and massing and are more related to finish and materials. Attorney Morris asked whether a more traditional approach to materials and appearance would be preferable to the Board, to which Member Dale responded that the Board may have different opinions, but the important items to note are shadowing and variation in the façade, and ensuring color accuracy in prints. Member Baker noted the importance of visual interest and cohesion, preparing a parking study, and referencing the recently approved project on 108 Water St. for history, lighting, and brickwork. Staff made special note of Condition 1a which would allow the ZBA to defer to the Historic District Commission for final approval.

VOTE

Member Dale motioned to continue the public hearing for 72 Mt Auburn to the meeting on March 25, 2026. Member Ferris seconded the motion, and the motion passed 5-0 through a roll call vote with Member(s) Ferris, Dale, Baker, Alternate Member Odamah, and Acting Chair Heep voting in favor.

Member Dale motioned, and Member Baker seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed 5-0 with Member(s) Ferris, Dale, Baker, Alternate Member Odamah, and Acting Chair Heep voting in favor.

MINUTES APPROVED:-----