

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: May 13, 2026, PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:03 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Janet Buck; Jason Cohen; Abigail Hammett; Rachael Sack;

MEMBERS ABSENT: Payson Whitney; Sarah Scott;

STAFF PRESENT: Sameena Pirani, Principal Departmental Assistant; Gideon Schreiber, Director of Planning & Zoning; Will Downie, Senior Planner;

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Approval of Minutes:

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of 4/8/2026.

Rachael Sack seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In Favor (Chair Janet Buck, Jason Cohen, Abigail Hammett and Rachael Sack)

66 Galen:

The Board reviewed a request to continue the public hearing at the next meeting on June 10, 2026. Staff explained the rationale for the continuance. The applicants requested a continuance based on tenant needs and feedback from staff, as well as due to the multiple member absences.

Chair Janet Buck formally opened the hearing. Motion for continuance was made by Jason Cohen, seconded by Abigail Hammett. Vote 4-0. In Favor (Chair Janet Buck, Jason Cohen, Abigail Hammett and Rachael Sack)

Rules of Practice and Procedure:

Staff presented an overview of the revisions made to the document, highlighting the updates made in response to Board feedback. Key changes included consolidating officer responsibilities to avoid duplication, adding procedures for appointing designees to the Community Preservation Committee and other future multi-member bodies, clarifying the formation of subcommittees and expanding responsibilities for the Chair and staff related to training and document distribution. The revisions also established a 48-hour cutoff for submission of meeting materials, altered the conflict-of-interest section, revised attendance removal language to give the city manager's discretion, clarified public comments time limits, added optional staff report presentations during hearings, reorganized for readability and added more explicit process for zoning amendments.

The Board discussed clarifying language on staff report presentations during hearings, with one member expressing concern that the word “may” was too vague. Staff explained that presentations were made at the discretion of the chair or board depending on the complexity and timing of a project. The discussion concluded with support for revising the language to specify that staff presentations occur at the discretion of the chair or Board.

Board members discussed clarifying language related to officer elections and agreed that the wording around the 45-day timeline should be referenced explicitly as the March meeting.

The Board also discussed creating a standardized script for the chair to read during meetings and public hearings to clearly explain procedures and public participation rules. Staff highlighted the sections that had been intentionally reformatted to serve as a user-friendly guide for applicants. They could also be adapted into a script for the chair to use during hearings.

The Board agreed to delay officer elections until the next meeting, noting that formal officer elections had not been part of practice.

The Board engaged in a detailed discussion of the Conflicts of Interest section of the Rules. After discussing examples, recusal processes, and complexity of Massachusetts ethic law, it was agreed that the rules should not serve as a full legal guide. Instead, it was decided to simplify the section by removing details, referencing state conflict of interest law (M.G.L. c.268A, and directing members to consult staff, legal counsel, or the Ethics Commission when questions arise.

Motion to adopt the Rules of Practice and Procedure for the City of Watertown Planning Board with revisions discussed at the meeting was made by Jason Cohen, seconded by Abigail Hammett. Vote 4-0. In Favor (Chair Janet Buck, Jason Cohen, Abigail Hammett and Rachael Sack)

Staff announced the Watertown Square Open House and updates on the City’s Housing Plan.

Meeting adjourned 8:01

Meeting Minutes-----