

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: January 13, 2021 PLACE: Virtual Meeting TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Regular Monthly Meeting

PRESENT: Jeff Brown, Chairman; Janet Buck; Payson Whitney; Jason Cohen
Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner;
Larry Field, Senior Planner

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Janet Buck motioned to approve Minutes of December 9, 2020 Planning Board meeting.
Payson Whitney seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In favor

CASES CONTINUED

- **66 Galen Street; Galen Street Development LLC – Special Permit/Site Plan Review**

William York, Atty, on behalf of the Boston Development Group, this is a proposal to construct a new Laboratory/Research & Development 4/5 story building with first level retail/service/office space. This gateway site is identified as a key development that consists of 6 lots. The proposal has taken 2 years of collaboration. We have fulfilled the Towns vision, traffic improvements are proposed.

Robert Doherty, VP of Boston Development Group, a full team is here tonight. We are the owners of 51-57 Water Street, there has been decline in neighboring properties. We have purchased the GMC Buick dealership, the gas station and vacant abutting lot. We now own over 5 acres of land, we will provide publically accessible amenities, open space and parks. A 199,537 s.f. Laboratory/Research and Development building with 277 lower level parking spaces will be constructed. Design review and storm water process is completed. We had 2 community meetings, followed by discussions with the Planning staff and other Town departments.

David Manfredi, Architect, this is an important site with proximity to Watertown Square and Charles River. Watertown Comprehensive Plan addresses this site as Gateway to Watertown and as potential higher density use. We will preserve existing open space and reinforce pedestrian connection. The site is now underutilized with no usable open space and no definition between public realm and private space. This is an opportunity to make parking invisible from Galen Street. The new development can define open space and activate streets. Public benefits will consist of creation of new jobs; bring additional tax revenue, off site infrastructure improvements. A \$150,000 annual contribution to TMA, improve bicycle circulation, create 2 new parks, 45% site open space, create public art within the parks. The design will be sensitive to the neighborhood and using high quality materials. The concerns at the community meetings were extra traffic, loosing parking on Galen Street for nearby businesses. Creation of thick planted buffer between 66 & 98 Galen Street, We are proposing significant amount of green space and improvement in movement of buses. A 5 story building of LAB/Research & Development will have 277 parking spaces bellow grade, solar panels will be placed on the roof. The open space will be publically accessible. Wider sidewalks will be created, the main lobby will face Watertown Square. Level 4 will be setback along Galen Street.

Timothy Talun, Project Manager, we are proposing pedestrian area, respecting the neighborhood, parking entirely below grade. Trash bins within the building, 45 bicycle parking spaces with showers. A 2 level lobby at the corner of Galen and Water Streets creating welcoming space. There will be

connection to Water and Galen Streets. A fitness space for tenants and access to outdoor space on each floor. A shadow study was completed, morning shadows cast to the west, noon to north. Summer shadows are minimal, longest shadow cast in December.

David Manfredi, the predominant material is terracotta, natural color, providing landmark status. A separation will be created between new and existing buildings.

Jeffrey Dirk, Vanesse & Assoc., this project will improve the traffic flow. Adaptive signal system will be installed around Watertown Square that will improve pedestrian safety. Robust TDM proposed, onsite parking reduced. A comprehensive improvement program followed, independent peer review consultant. All data collection done prior to COVID restrictions. There will be seamless transition, traffic flow will improve in the area, reducing cut through. Study area includes 15 intersections plus 3 additional, very comprehensive study provided. A missing connection at Water Street to the River will be created. A full time coordinator will be employed. 60% of employee drive alone, benefits will be given to employees that commute by bikes. Traffic signals reduce wait time at intersections. We will coordinate with MBTA to relocate access to Watertown Yard, complete connection to Casey Park. Pedestrian and bicycle connection will improve. Dedicated bus lane will be created, no interaction with cars. There will be no movement to Aldrich Road and safe accessibility for pedestrians will be provided.

Shawna Gillies-Smith, Ground Inc , clear pedestrian path along Galen Street will be created. We are proposing 50,000 s.f. will be dedicated to pedestrian open space that will be open to public use. Streetscape is very generous that will establish Galen Street streetscape. A neighborhood park, 2 bus shelters, tables and chairs across the main lobby of the building. We will incorporate public art, planting palate includes New England species. A sloping park connection from Galen to Water Street is handicap accessible. A door from the new building to Park, sitting area on top of the parking garage. Feature lighting and sidewalk along Galen Street provide space for healthy trees. Plantings will be placed on wide sidewalk on Water Street. We are proposing very welcoming enjoyable pedestrian experience. Compliant with picking light fixtures that provide safety will be consistent at both parks.

Timothy Tulon, we have commitment to sustainability and we will work closely with Department of Public Works. Rain water storage system will be placed under parking garage, we are proposing 100% irrigation system. A healthy interior environment will be provided, significant open space is proposed and the site is LEED Gold certifiable.

Jeff Brown, this is a very thorough presentation, very easy to understand. What is timing of the project when will Phase II start?

Robert Doherty, we have already received inquiry about Phase II, Moriarty is ready to start.

Gideon Schreiber, the petitioner is requesting multiple reliefs under Special Permit/Site Plan Review: New construction of office, Lab/R&D with first level retail/service & office. Additional height and roof top mechanical & screening, expanded build to line, reduction of side yard setbacks, contiguous facades in keeping with Design Guidelines and reduced parking. Staff worked with the petitioner, significant planning effort with MBTA staff. We are satisfied with number of components that were met, the project

complies with the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance and the vision of Design Guidelines. Utilities, storm water, sewer and easements to be finalized on old and new Water Street. Utility poles will be underground as one of the conditions, DPW identified gas lines. Transportation Demand Plan will be implemented. Planning staff has been working with the project team for a year and they satisfied all aspects.

Payson Whitney, a goal to provide grand entrance to Watertown has been accomplished. The petitioner is allowing customer parking spaces for neighboring businesses, how will people know that they can park in the garage? Any discussion with the MBTA to use their spaces for business parking? What is the color of the façade? The interior lighting should be on timer so that it does not affect neighbors at night

Robert Doherty, we have to let the businesses know that there are 7 spaces in the garage and two 30 minute spaces on the street for pickup.

Gideon Schreiber, MBTA will be using the spaces for breaks between rides. Wayfinding program is being developed in the Town now.

David Manfredi, terracotta color has not been yet selected, there are many options and flexibility.

Janet Buck, crossing to the River can be dangerous, is there a signal proposed going to the River? This design is a huge improvement.

Jason Cohen, this is a really exciting proposal that is appropriate for a gateway to Watertown. It has been blight for a long time. The architecture is very impressive, enhancement far reaching. This presentation will convince people of the major improvement. I am concerned with the bus noise at the park. How much use will the park get, will it be maintained by the developer? Will the retail space face the public areas?

Jeffrey Dirk, we are proposing high visibility markings and pedestrian flashing crossing light. Employees that choose public transit will receive monthly stipend. It will be required for every tenant,

Robert Doherty, retail will be easily accessed to the public from Galen Street and the main lobby.

Mark Sideris, Town Council President, as a long time resident of the nearby neighborhood, I am very impressed by this design which should be very easy for the Board to approve. This will provide many benefits to the community and major improvements to the traffic.

Paula Farina Pollis, I have been in favor of the project since day one. There are couple of important issues that have to be addressed. Our business has been at the same location across from Galen Street for 45 years. Elimination of municipal parking in the area cannot happen. Parking is a problem, we need to be creative for surrounding businesses and neighbors. It is the responsibility of the Town to look out for them. The new crosswalk is proposed directly at our driveway blocking our parking spaces. Are the two parking spaces at the petitioner's site guaranteed? Can you work with the MBTA to get

back the 15 loss spaces on Galen Street? It has to be done now, not after the completion of the project.

Mike Farina, I am concerned with the crosswalk that is directly at our parking area. The neighboring restaurant New Ginza has outdoor seating. People take left turn onto Aldrich Road. The MBTA is not doing anything for the Town, they should help with the parking.

Gideon Schreiber, we will have peer review look at it prior to ZBA meeting. MBTA and the Town have to have discussion that is not part of this project.

Ingrid Marchesano, we have not received any additional questions via email.

Janet Buck motioned to recommend to the Zoning Board of Appeals approval of the Special Permit/Site Plan Review under Sections 5.01.1(k)2, 5.01.5(e), 5.05(f), 4.10, 6.01(f)(h) Contiguous façade, Exceptions to height/rooftop features, Reduced/Shadow parking, based upon the finding that it meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance subject to conditions set forth in the staff report with additional conditions that the interior lighting be regulated with a timer for the protection of abutters and that Galen Street crosswalk issue be addressed..

Jason Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

- **46 Kondazian Street; Konway LLC - Special Permit**

Ken Leitner, this is a request for a Special Permit to construct 2 light industrial bays to a side of existing structure being used as office space in an I-2 zone, reducing the left setback to 5 feet and the right side setback to 24 feet. The 16,000 s.f. lot is abutting T zone and Atrium School. We are proposing light industrial use, access from the rear, with 12 parking spaces. The residential façade will be kept, landscape buffer added, all business will be from the rear. This is an appropriate use of the property, there will be no adverse affect on the neighborhood. The house was built in 1920, criteria for granting of Special permit is met.

Larry Field, this property is a transition area between industrial and residential use. The structure is industrial by right but this use is preferable. The trash area is next to abutting residential property, staff recommends that it should be moved further away from the lot line. Conditions will regulate the site so that it would not affect abutting residents. We are proposing that noise will be minimized, hours of operation, pickup and delivery specified. There are 12 parking spaces that are not always used. Staff recommends conditional approval.

Jeff Brown, this building will be used as office space only. If residents live next door, will they be affected by the noise? Is there a use that would create minimal noise? How could that be controlled?

Ken Leitner, all work will be done inside, with access from the rear only, facing other industrial properties. There will not be any outside storage of materials and tools. Trash bins have been moved from the property line. We are now looking for tenants that are doing light manufacturing only. We have an interest from a company that assembles gift baskets that will be shipped. There will not be any customers visiting the site. Some of the conditions in the staff report need to be modified.

Jason Cohen, it is hard to establish what is appropriate for this property. This building does not look residential structure. What type of materials will be used on the additions? Any roof top equipment should be shielded from the street. Trash area needs to be moved away from the residential property line.

Ken Leitner, the material on the additions will be the same as the original structure.

Janet Buck, I am familiar with the neighborhood, this is a better solution then what could be done by right.

Payson Whitney, what is the setback of the overhang, does it exceed what is allowed, and is it the nearest part of the structure?

Angeline Kounelis, Town Council, are any abutters present? There is an interest from possible tenant, but we do not know how long the lease will be. Noise is a major issue, this is an opportunity to address it now. Bay doors should always stay closed during work day. Currently there are couple of storage containers in the parking lot, will they stay? I have received an email from neighbors across the street expressing concern with snow removal. Some residential properties have Grove Street address, I encourage residents to participate in this discussion.

Ken Leitner, the storage containers will be moved from the property. Snow will be pushed to NW corner on the site.

Ingrid Marchesano, we have not received any email questions regarding this project.

Gideon Schreiber, condition #8 in the staff report does not allow any sales conducted on this property.

Larry Field, that condition can be modified to allow sales from the site without customers.

Janet Buck motioned that the Planning Board recommends to the Zoning Board of Appeals conditional approval of the Special Permit under Section 5.05(d) Reduction of setback based upon the finding that it meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance subject to conditions set forth in the staff report and additional condition that the trash bins be relocated to the left at parking space #12..

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

- **23-29 Elm Street; 23 Elm Street Property Owner LLC – Special Permit/Site Plan Review**

Andy Mann, Elm Street Partners, this is a proposal to raze the existing building and construct a modern design 3-story laboratory building. This project has 3 partners, we have met with Planning staff and David Gamble.

David Schwarzman, Elm Street Partners, this is an opportunity to become a part of Watertown Community,

Steve Winnick, Atty, the petitioner is requesting a SP for the redevelopment of this light industrial site located in the RMUD district. We are not asking the Board to vote tonight to allow us to provide more detail. The site is located in the East End of Watertown, abutting Watertown Mall, adjacent to the new

Residence Inn Hotel, in proximity to Arsenal Yards that is being developed. The RMUD district encourages new uses, we will raze the deteriorated structure and replace it with a modern LAB building which will serve as a center for life sciences that is part of greater Boston Biotech revolution. Portion of the site is within the 50 foot no build zone. We have had several meetings with the Conservation Commission. The environmental issues will be improved, we will come back to the February Planning Board meeting to answer any questions. We will also attend to Conservation and Historical Commission.

Alan Westman, Architect, there are 3 buildings on the site, lots of asphalt pavement and 2 curb cuts. The project will provide significant improvement. The 3 story/40 feet high structure will have all parking under the building, LEED silver certified, 13,000 s.f. of solar panels and out of the 50 foot no build zone. Energy efficient materials will be used, trash and recycling will be placed within the building, 20 bicycle parking spaces and amenities will be provided, with separation of bicycle and car spaces. We are respectful to our neighbors by placing screen of greenery to conceal the parking garage. Three long-term tenants will occupy first and second floor, 2 long term tenants on the 3rd floor. Roof plan is showing placement solar panels and mechanical equipment.

Jim Borreback, OHI, there is a 14ft drop from the SE corner to property on Elm Street property line. Some property comes under the jurisdiction of wetland protection. We are coordinating with DPW on final design of utility services. Landscape has 3 primary elements, we are proposing to create plaza at the front entry on Elm Street, planting variety of perennials, enhancing wild life habitat.

Jeffrey Dirk, Vanasse & Associates, traffic study is still under peer review, the mitigation package is finalized. Arsenal/Elm/Arlington and intersection at Coolidge are reviewed. We are also the traffic consultants for other projects in the area. Plans are not showing the Watertown Greenway. Linkage to Arsenal Street is important to TDM, no more than 60% of employees cannot arrive alone in vehicles. We will provide financial incentives for employees to use public transportation. All vehicles will be parked inside the garage that will have active manager. Cars that park off site will be towed.

Jeff Brown, the community meeting summary is showing different building. New updated plans and aerial photographs are needed. Does our consultant David Gamble like the orientation of this building, preferring this design. The back façade looks very dark.

Alan Westman, the colors of the façade have not been finalized. We have a letter of support from the abutters, the hotel, etc. There are no windows on the side facing the hotel.

Payson Whitney, I like the orientation of the building,

Janet Buck, I agree with Jeff regarding the need of aerial photographs. Why does the petitioner need the Historical Commission approval? We never see parking at LYNX fully used, maybe because of COVID<

Jason Cohen, I agree that the parking is more than demand. This is an improvement over the existing building but I would like to see more detail and material samples. Every proposal for biotech building has some outdoor space for the tenants. We need detailed landscape and the Plaza. I am uncomfortable with the building being at property line, too close to the hotel.

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Gideon Schreiber, all buildings in Watertown that are older than 50 years need demolition approval.

OTHER BUSINESS

Jeff Brown adjourned the meeting at 10:30 pm.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 10:30 PM MINUTES APPROVED: _____

For more detailed Minutes see the DVD dated 1/13/2021 available in the DCD&P office.