TOWN OF WATERTOWN

Zoning Board of Appeals

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MINUTES

On Wednesday evening, January 27th, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. the Zoning Board of Appeals held a public hearing in accordance with the Governor's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G. L. c. 30A, § 20. Due to the 2020 Covid-19 emergency and to avoid group congregation, the meeting included remote access with public participation through WCA TV (Watertown Cable Access Television) and during the meeting, utilizing virtual meeting software for remote access.

In attendance: Melissa M. SantucciRozzi, *Chair*; David Ferris, *Clerk;* Christopher Heep, *Member*; Kelly Donato, *Member*; Michael Brangwynne, Alternate Member; also Present Mike Mena, *Zoning Enforcement Officer*; Gideon Schreiber, *Senior Planner;* Larry Field, *Senior Planner;* Joshua Manion, *Zoning Division Clerk*

Chair SantucciRozzi opened the meeting, welcomed the Board Members, staff and members of the public. The Chair then provided instruction of how the meeting would be conducted in a virtual format, and outlined different opportunities for the public to participate in deliberations. The Board requested a roll call of the present Board Members; five Members of the Board were present, four full Members and one alternate Member.

The Chair then briefly outlined the Agenda for this meeting, noting the order in which the Board would hear the cases as well as which cases would be continued.

Item #1: Approval of Minutes

Chair SantucciRozzi requested approval of the Minutes for the December and November Meetings. Member Ferris questioned if both sets of Minutes could be voted on in the same vote, Chair confirmed they could. Member Ferris motioned to approve both sets of Minutes; motion seconded by Member Heep. Motion to approve November and December Minutes passed by roll call vote, 5 – 0, with Members Ferris, Heep, Donato, Brangwynne, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.

Item #2: 190-196 Summer St.

Chair SantucciRozzi introduced the first petition to be heard and Member Ferris read the legal notice:

"190-196 Summer Street. Trask, Inc. requests a Special Permit under §5.05(r) for FAR increase over 0.5 but less than 0.625 and Special Permit Finding under §4.06(a) to continue a pre-existing, non- conforming setback by removing the existing rear addition and second floor exterior access staircase and constructing a new two-level rear addition. Located in the T (Two-Family) Zoning District. ***ZBA- 2021-01."***

The Applicant, Trask, Inc. - represented by Ben and Matthew Stevens, presented the history of the site in question and the details of their proposal.

The Applicants explained the scope of their proposal involves removing the existing garage structure, as it was deemed unsalvageable, for which they have already obtained the required approval from the Historic Commission. Additionally, the Applicants intend to remove the existing rear addition to the house, and construct a new, two-story addition in the rear of the house; as well as constructing a new addition situated in the front side of the house.

Mr. Ben Stevens noted the relief being sought; FAR increase (above 0.5 but below 0.625) and the continuation of non-conforming aspects of the house that protrude into the required side yard setbacks. Mr. Stevens then walked through the design plans, floor plans, and addressed a few particulars that had been identified by Town Staff as potential issues; and noted the revisions he made to address these concerns. Chair SantucciRozzi thanked the Applicants, and opened up the Board's deliberations.

Member Donato inquired about the materials the Applicant intends to use for the new additions, and whether or not they would be uniform or matching with the existing materials. The Applicants stated that while they had not settled on materials at that point, they intend to match materials and colors to ensure the project looks aesthetically cohesive.

Member Ferris questioned a number of aspects of the proposal, including: inconsistencies between the plans and elevations the Board had received and the plans being shown in the presentation; the peculiar shape of the roof on the existing rear addition; whether or not there would be mechanical equipment on the top of the rear addition roof; the orientation and spacing of the driveway and walkway; and the placement of a window well. The Applicants addressed these questions in turn, and the Board asked Town Staff to ensure updated plans are submitted prior to permit issuance.

Chair SantucciRozzi followed up on a number of Member Ferris' comments, notably the parking plan. The Chair suggested widening the parking spaces, as the parking layout as shown on the plans appears to be tight. Chair SantucciRozzi stated that she likes the plans in general, however it is imperative that updated plans and drawings be submitted; and the parking layout may warrant additional revisions to ensure it works.

The Chair opened up the discussion to the public; one member of the public commented in support of the proposal, but criticized the process as taking too long and wasting the City's time. Chair SantucciRozzi addressed this by noting that the Board Members all volunteer their time, and that they believe a thorough review of proposals to be critical to the positive development of Watertown. No written comments were submitted.

Chair SantucciRozzi then closed the public portion of the hearing and asked if any Board Members had follow up questions. The Chair recapitulated the scope of relief being sought, the additional conditions the Board outlined, and noted that the Staff Report recommended favorable action. Member Ferris motioned to approve the proposal, seconded by Member Donato. Motion to approve passed by roll-call vote, 5 – 0, with Members Ferris, Donato, Heep, Brangwynne, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor. Approved with conditions.

Item #3: 66 Galen St.
Chair SantucciRozzi introduced the next item on the agenda, and Member Ferris read the legal notice:

"66 Galen St. Galen Street Development, LLC requests a Special Permit and Site Plan Review to construct a new 4/5 story, 199,537 sq. ft. Laboratory/Research and Development building with 277 lower level parking spaces pursuant to: §5.01.5(e) New Construction Laboratories/Research and Development with §5.01.3(a,b) ancillary first level retail/service/office; Special Permit §4.10 additional height and rooftop mechanicals and screening, §4.1 l(d) Expanded Build to Line, §5.05(d) Reduction Side Yard Setbacks, §5.05(f) Contiguous Facades in keeping with Design Guidelines, §5.05 (i) FAR of 1.8 and §6.01(f) Reduced Parking, §9.03, §9.05, §9.06 Site Plan Review Special Permit; Special Permit Criteria for the 1-2 District. ***ZBA-2020-22****"*

The applicant was represented by a number of individuals, including Mr. Bill York, Mr. Bob Doherty, Mr. David Manfredi, and Mr. Tim Talun; as well as a number of specialists to detail particular aspects of the proposal as needed.

The applicants began by providing background on the site and how this proposal ties in to the Town's comprehensive plan. They noted the history of the site and the accompanying traffic issues that exist in the immediate area, and stated that the proposal was designed to help mitigate traffic and work seamlessly with the nearby MBTA bus station. The Applicant's team detailed the deficiencies in the existing physical conditions of the site (vacant lots and buildings, general topography, impervious coverage, etc.) and noted how this proposal would improve on or address the existing deficiencies.

The Applicant's team reviewed the community meetings that were held to engage with the public and noted that the general reception to the project was positive. The existing traffic conditions on Galen St. and the intersection of Galen St. and Nonantum Rd. were widely identified as sources of major public concern, and the applicants expressed a desire to positively impact the traffic conditions through this project.

Mr. Manfredi detailed the site plan and reviewed the general scope of the project, noting that they would be adding up to fifty thousand (50,000) square feet of publicly accessible open space. He presented the different elevations of the proposed building, and Mr. Talun described the respective floor plans. Mr. Manfredi went through the dimensional specifications of the building, noting the different sections of the building and the intent behind the design as it relates to the surrounding area.

Mr. Talun discussed the floors plans and spent time detailing the features of the lobby area; like the high ceiling to accommodate an upper and lower area, with a food service area on the upper floor. Additionally, Mr. Talun noted the fitness space on the ground floor as an added public-use amenity. The Applicant's team drew attention to the roof design, which was created to maximize the number of solar panels that could be used, and briefly described the type of materials that would be used on the exterior of the building. Mr. Talun pointed out that each tenant level would have balconies to access outside space and allow for more natural light into the building.

The Applicant's team then presented the details of the transportation management and landscaping plans proposed for the site and the surrounding area; with the new parks and bus stations being a focal point. Jeffery Dirk took over discussion to elucidate on the transportation analysis and transportation demand management plan. He noted a number of offsite improvements: adaptive traffic signals at the intersection of Galen St. and Nonantum Rd.; crosswalk and sidewalk improvements; new, dedicated bus lanes; the creation of an ancillary road to be named New Water St.; and the improvements at the intersection of Aldrich Rd., New Water St., and Galen St. Further, Mr. Dirk noted that they would be offering stipends to employees on site for transit and blue bike use to mitigate traffic concerns.

Shauna Gillies-Smith, landscape architect, outlined the landscape plan for the site. Ms. Gillies-Smith began by noting the reduction in curb cuts along the Galen St. section of the site, stating that this would create a smoother pedestrian experience and increase the site's connectivity. Ms. Gillies-Smith detailed the parks and how they would interact with the spaces around the site, focusing on the interconnectivity the parks would provide by increasing pedestrian access to bus stations and the Charles River pathway towards Nonantum St. Ms. Gillies-Smith also described the art installations that would be created in the bus station area, which would screen the busses from the park area without creating 'blind spots' so as to decrease potential security issues.

Mr. Talun then reviewed the Stormwater Management Plan, noting that all landscaping on this site would be irrigated by rainwater on site. Mr. Talun described how the rainwater harvesting plan and Stormwater Plan highlight the Applicant's commitment to improving the site in a sustainable way that coincides with the Town's development goals. Finally, Mr. Talun thanked the Board for their attention and closed the presentation.

The Chair and the other Board Members thanked the Applicant and their team for the thorough nature of their presentation, and began their deliberations.

Member Ferris commented that he had not seen a proposal that would be as impactful as this one, and applauded the team for their attention to detail in putting it together. Member Ferris questioned a number of points of the proposal, first asking about the garage entry and whether or not there would be a device that closes off entry to the parking garage during off-peak hours. Mr. Talun replied that there would be a parking control gate, but not a full door that closes. Member Ferris asked if the public would have access to the retail and fitness component that was shown on the first floor of the building; Mr. Doherty responded to this by saying that they intend for this space to be publicly accessible, and that the only instance in which this would not be the case is if a single tenant occupies the whole building and requests sole use of the designated fitness area. Member Ferris then asked if the utilities were being moved underground, as the existing poles and wires are not shown on the plans. Mr. Talun confirmed the utility lines would be moved below grade.

Member Ferris expressed his pleasure in seeing the continuity of street plantings would be continued along Galen St., and asked about the placement of a few trees near the Watertown Yard MBTA Bus Station. This question led to discussion between Mr. Doherty and Gideon Schreiber, Sr. Planner for the Town, regarding the need to work with the MBTA to create an easement that would allow a multi-use pathway along MBTA owned land.

Member Donato questioned if wayfinding was being proposed to assist the public in finding the designated spaces in the parking garage that were marked out for the neighborhood businesses, the

Applicant's team expressed agreement and stated that wayfinding signs would be installed. Member Donato then asked who would be tasked with the upkeep of the new bus stations that would be added in this proposal, leading to another discussion between Mr. Doherty and the Town's Sr. Planner who described the series of easements that would be required between the MBTA and the Applicant. They explained that the talks were advanced and that they would reach an agreement to ensure the bus stations are adequately maintained.

The Applicant's team then addressed Chair SantucciRozzi's questions concerning a number of aspects of the proposal, including: intended occupancy in the 'screened wall' area of the site; the environmental grading of the site and the environmental impact of the proposal; and what provisions will be taken to minimize the impact of the construction process on the surrounding area.

Chair SantucciRozzi then extensively questioned the proposal's impact on the traffic patterns of the surrounding area, particularly as it relates to the proposed new traffic signals at the intersection of Aldrich Rd. and Galen St. and to the existing intersection and signals at Galen St. and Nonantum Rd. The cost to the Town of the proposed adaptive traffic signals was identified as something that would need to be calculated as the project developed. Chair SantucciRozzi also questioned the bus-traffic flow and park orientation, as well as the crosswalks that would be installed at the intersection of Aldrich Rd. and Galen St. The Chair noted the bus station circulation pathway seems a bit confusing, and could potentially lead to non-MBTA vehicles becoming confused and traveling into areas that are designated for buses only. Mr. Dirk explained the type of signage they would be putting up to mitigate that risk, and noted that it was the MBTA who specifically requested the circular flow to make bus flow smoother.

Finally; Chair SantucciRozzi requested that the Applicant try to work with the businesses across Galen St. to develop and maximize the parking available to their patrons. Sr. Planner Gideon Schreiber noted that the Applicant would need to provide a parking management plan before being issued a permit. The Chair then followed up on one of Member Ferris' concerns regarding the existing mature trees on Galen St. before opening up discussion to the public.

Public discussion saw Town Council President, Mr. Mark Sideris, as well as the owner of Farina's Bike Shop, Ms. Paula Pollis, discuss the project with the Board. Mr. Sideris commented as a private citizen, noting that he lives close to the site in question, that he was impressed with the quality of the proposal, and that this proposal raises the bar for commercial projects in Watertown. Mr. Sideris expressed support for the project and finished by saying that this project should be the standard by which the ZBA holds all future commercial development proposals.

Ms. Pollis opened by thanking the development team for addressing some of her concerns that were raised during previous public meetings concerning this project, and noted that she is generally in support of this proposal. That being said, Ms. Pollis pointed out that a number of her concerns were still left unaddressed by the Applicant's team; particularly the elimination of parking in front of her business, and the installation of a crosswalk directly in front of her building.

She requested that the Town reexamine possible parking alternatives to help service the businesses on the opposite side of Galen St. The Town's Sr. Planner responded to Ms. Pollis by saying that she should contact his office or the Town's Transportation Planner where they could work out her concerns about parking, as the developers of this proposal nor the Zoning Board would not be able to specifically address some of her concerns. Ms. Pollis agreed to do so and raised a final question about the proposed installation of new crosswalks and signals at Galen St. and Aldrich Rd., as that would be directly tied to this development. She noted that this would regularly create traffic blocks directly in front of the entrance to her business. After the Applicant's team and Town Staff discussed this concern with her, Ms. Pollis agreed to work out remedies to her concerns with Town Staff.

The Chair recognized a public comment questioning the TMA contribution that would be put forward by the Applicant. Chair SantucciRozzi then closed the public comment portion of the meeting, and asked the Board Members if they had any additional questions or comments, which they did not.

Chair SantucciRozzi recapitulated the scope of relief sought, noted the recommendations of approval by the Planning Board and Town Staff, and noted the design review submitted by the Town's design consultant, David Gamble. The Chair noted the conditions of approval, and noted her desire to have two additional conditions included; that the retail portion of the development remains open to the public, and that the existing trees must be preserved if possible. Member Ferris brought up the condition about requiring the street parking spaces opposite the development to be striped, Town Staff stated this would be reviewed by DPW.

Member Heep then motioned for approval of this proposal with the conditions outlined in the Planning Board Report and by the Chair. Member Brangwynne seconded this motion. Motion to approve passed by roll-call vote, 5 – 0, with Members Heep, Brangwynne, Ferris, Donato, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor. Approved with conditions.

Motion to adjourn made by Member Heep, seconded by Member Donato. Motion to adjourn passed by roll call vote, 5 – 0, with Members Ferris, Donato, Heep, Brangwynne, and Chair SantucciRozzi voting in favor.