

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: March 10, 2021 PLACE: Virtual Meeting TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

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

PUBLIC HEARING

ZONING AMENDMENTS

Section 5.01 Table of Use Regulations

Section 5.03 Notes to Table of Use Regulations

Gideon Schreiber, this is a request of a property owner of 64 Pleasant Street that would allow reuse of properties in CB district for laboratory and related uses.

Christian Regnier, Attorney for Berkeley Investments, we are requesting to amend CB (Central Business) district to expand allowable R&D/Lifestyle uses in existing historic buildings (built before 1937). Berkeley Investments are the new owners of the former Sasaki buildings/Chase Mills complex. This proposal is consistent with the Town preservation plan of historic buildings. We are proposing to add 4 new uses such as Lab, Light industry, non-nuisance manufacturing and renewable/alternative energy. The architecture of structures will be preserved. We will upgrade mechanical systems, Class B space will change to Class A within the footprint of existing building. The commercial tax base will increase. The diversity of business is consistent with Comprehensive Plan preservation of historic buildings. The zoning relief is needed for this project that is within major Square in Town. It will provide further growth in Watertown, solid base of employment and support local retail centers and clusters of restaurants and small shops. It is not the same density as prior to the pandemic. This is the first step, we will file application for the proposed project.

Esther Byun, Berkeley Project Manager, we have experience with a conversion in existing historic buildings such as Chase Mills at 64 Pleasant Street. This is the original water powered mill, former garment manufacturing firm, commercial laundry, etc. Buildings remain intact, which we will protect. The latest was the home of Sasaki Architects, we will highlight its industrial past. The exterior of the building will be protected. The Lab use will match today's economy but we will honor the sites industrial past.

Gideon Schreiber, the petitioner did a good job detailing the site. This is a virtual hearing, we will not use the chat function, we will use question/answer. The staff met with the petitioner regarding Watertown Square history. Some of the proposed uses are identified in the Comprehensive Plan. Staff is fully in support of the proposed uses, it meets the goals and expectations. The amendment only applies to these buildings that existed prior to the 1937 adoption of the Watertown Zoning Ordinance. It is appropriate use allowed by right up to 4,000 s.f. and with Site Plan Review if greater than 4,000 s.f.

Jeff Brown, this presentation was almost like a project proposal.

Gideon Schreiber, this presentation is about a zoning amendment, not for a specific project.

Morgan Pearson, the outside of the structure will not be changed, nor the roof removed, work will be done within the building only.

Jason Cohen, I am in favor of this amendment. Will the windows be changed or accessory structures removed to open the site to the River? What are the limitations of the amendments?

Christian Regnier, we will not be moving any walls, we will stay within the walls of the existing building.

Gideon Schreiber, this presentation is about use within the building. Building changes would be discussed under the Site Plan Review and building permit. The proposed use will be integrated within the buildings. The Chase Mills complex does not have historic designation and no protection.

Payson Whitney, how many pre 1937 structures are in the CB district? Life Science proposals are on our agenda every month, we need to discuss how many should be allowed in Watertown.

Curtis Whitney, 43 Grandview, Berkeley is great company with phenomenal track record. It would be more appropriate to discuss potential overlay district for the Pleasant Street area. Someone could combine few old buildings along Mount Auburn Street and change the use. This is a great project, but other CB considerations should be taken in as well.

Mr., conversion of the Sasaki building makes sense but why should Watertown change the entire CB district? A developer could purchase all the buildings in the area and convert the use.

James Miner, Sasaki CEO, I am in support of this proposal. Sasaki acquired the property in 1970's. It was not an easy decision to sell the building. We have received number of proposals, but all wanted to do full demolition. This is a creative proposal that would allow for Lab space to be within the historic structure.

Angie Kounelis, Town Council, number of Lab space are currently being proposed. Canistraro property at 290 Pleasant Street was originally build as Lab but after being empty for awhile it was converted to residential. All that has to be taken into consideration, the Board should be cautious about rezoning.

Vincent Piccirilli, Town Council, we have been approached by Sasaki regarding the sale of their building. Originally the building was mostly used for light manufacturing. These buildings are not protected by historic designations, I fully support the proposed zoning amendment. My primary concern is to preserve these iconic structures and the economic element of the proposal. This is an opportunity to allow these buildings to be preserved.

John Labadini, I agree with these statements. Overlay idea seems to be more appealing, I am not comfortable with rezoning all CB districts in Watertown.

Gideon Schreiber, Salusti building on Main Street was built in 1975, it would not be affected. Many lots are very small. Otis building on Watertown Square is several stories high.

Curtis Whitney, can the Board consider allowing this project to go forward but create overlay to give the Town more time to decide how to proceed with the rest of CB district properties?

Gideon Schreiber, creation of Overlay district is much more complex change. If the Board is concerned with this zoning amendment, it can be amended in the future. There are many vacant store fronts in Watertown Square, manufacturing in back is not allowed today.

Jason Cohen, it was stated that there are 13 properties that will be impacted by this.

Janet Buck, that would eliminate some buildings.

Christian Regnier, if changed, the recommendation would have to go back to the Town Council. We can add some language that narrows the geography. Uses above 4,000 s.f. are needed for Life Sciences and would be under site plan review. Under 4,000 s.f. such uses as breweries, etc. would be allowed by right.

Anthony Donato, Town Councilor, if we add geographic boundaries, would these other pre-1937 properties no longer qualify?

Gideon Schreiber, I think the proposal would then be limited to four parcels on Pleasant Street and Galen Street plus two small parcels.

Jason Cohen, I would like to adopt the amendment as proposed.

Vincent Piccirilli, Town Councilor, historically Watertown Square was very lively space, manufacturing existed primary because of the Charles River. Somerville rezoned some areas near the river to allow small businesses to add funky charm to it. The primary goal is to preserve the Chase Mill building and add some excitement to the Square. I am asking the Planning Board to leave the amendment as proposed.

Jeff Brown closed the public hearing.

Janet Buck motioned that the Planning Board recommends to the Town Council to approve the proposed amendment to Section 5.01 Table of Use Regulations and Section 5.03 Notes to Table of Use Regulations as submitted – See attached.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In favor

REGULAR MEETING

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Janet Buck motioned to approve Minutes of February 10, 2021 Planning Board meeting.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In favor

CASES CONTINUED

- **390 Arsenal Street; NS AJO Holdings, Inc. – Special Permit**

Michael Ross, Atty, we are currently located at 23 Elm Street. The building is being sold and we had to look for a new location.

Alex Hardy, we have opened at the current location in July 2020. There have not been any incidents, we had approximately 247 customers per day, and the business will generate \$375,000 to \$400,000 per year in Host Community fees. Building is now sold and we are proposing to move the operation to the former Brake service center on Arsenal Street. The 22,417 s.f. site has an existing one-story structure that was built in 1978. There are 2 curb cuts off Arsenal Street. Watertown-Cambridge Greenway is located behind the parcel. We are proposing significant landscaping, 23 parking spaces and 3 shadow parking spaces. Bike racks will be provided and waste area will be reduced. There will be natural barriers to neighbors, 30% of open space where 25% is required and enhanced vegetation around the rear. We owe 3 other dispensaries in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Each is little different. The envelope of the building will be preserved, we are proposing natural color scheme and frosted windows as required by the State. We are proposing state of the art security system, adult use only and medical sales. We will also have online preordering and pick up. This is a highly regulated industry. The operation must move in January 2022, construction will proceed through the summer. Traffic study is prepared, we have signed for TMA membership, promoting public transit. We will have 100% coverage of video surveillance. There will be no loitering, anyone who creates nuisance will be banned from all our sites. We want to be good neighbors, community meeting was in January. We will provide significant fees to the city. We are proposing to beautify this vacant eyesore property, there will not be adverse traffic impact, the proposed TDM plan has been approved. This is a positive plan, we will have full control over this property.

Larry Field, staff recommends conditional approval. Petitioner worked with the town, will provide additional landscape buffer to the Greenway. They have been very responsive to Town Councilor Angie Kounelis. Staff added additional items to the landscaping plan, such as number of trees, shrubbery, plans have been already revised. Other items have also been corrected and new plans will be submitted prior to the ZBA meeting.

Anthony Donato, Town Councilor, this is a much better location than 23 Elm Street. This team has gone through several approval processes. It will be beneficial to the Town.

Susan Ladou, will the building be sustainable?

Mathew McGeorge, architect, it will comply with all Mass codes and will exceed all energy codes.

Angie Kounelis, Town Councilor, thank you for responding to my concerns. The fence in the rear was broken, other issues have been addressed and property cleaned-up.

Jeff Brown, is there a fence between the Greenway and this site?

Alex Hardy, Greenway maintains the fence and we will help if we are allowed.

Payson Whitney, will the site have right turn only from this site? Did we specify hours at the other approvals?

Janet Buck, this project will be a big improvement of the site.

Jason Cohen, is this site being purchased or just leased? Is this property subject to solar roof panels? I am in favor of this proposal. This is the best location for this team.

Michael Ross, the team cleaned up the site. The intent/goal is to purchase the property.

Under the conditions, there will be no deliveries to customers or patients, and no curbside pick-up. However, many patients are home bound. We do not know what the future will be. We might have to allow deliveries. We are asking that some of the conditions in the staff report be removed.

Larry Field, some conditions have been inserted by the ZBA, they understand the COVID situation. ZBA decision in February 2020 had the same conditions. 23 Elm Street did not permit deliveries to clients/patients.

Gideon Schreiber, curb side pick up is allowed because of the COVID but not a drive through. Conditions are consistent with other approvals.

Jason Cohen, conditions approved at the 23 Elm Street site should carry over to the new location.

Janet Buck motioned to recommend to the Zoning Board of Appeals approval of the Special Permit under Sections 5.01.5(I) & 8.04, based upon the finding that it meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance subject to conditions set forth in the staff report.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

- **580 Pleasant Street;** Griffith Properties, LLC - Special Permit

Marci Loeber, Griffith Properties, the building was built in phases in 1960's. One acre was leased to the abutter. We are proposing to convert the structure to Life Science.

Hugh Hahn, VHB/Project Manager, we have received Notice of Intent from Conservation Commission. We are asking to amend and restate Special Permit issued in 1982. We are seeking parking reduction and reconstructing the parking lot. We have submitted Survey Plan of Land to complete the lease and Storm Water Management Control Permit. The proposed project is a renovation/conversion of the existing building to Lab/R&D/office use. We will enhance the landscaping and provide parking lot lighting. We will join the TMA and provide access to public path along the Charles River. The existing 2 story concrete building includes basement, and is handicap-accessible though one entry. The proposed project will stay within the existing footprint. We will provide interior trash and recycling, expand the loading dock, we will improve the site circulation and reduce the impervious area. Community path connection will be constructed, all utilities will be underground. Open space will be

increased, there are many flowering trees on site. We will work with Conservation Commission along the River. This area was a former Watertown landfill, we will rebuild the entire parking lot. Waterline will be replaced and extended. We have met with Fire Department to review the plans.

David Godfrey, first floor will be used for multiple tenants, center spine entrance will be created. We can accommodate 1-9 tenants. Basement space can be used for loading dock, trash space, substantial bike room, and 1 tenant space is proposed. Second floor will have an open floor plan with center core and Class A Lab space. Roof will have an enclosed penthouse for mechanical equipment, exhaust fans will have to stay outside. Mechanical equipment will be screened. Building will be obscured by vegetation. We will meet the Watertown noise ordinance. Some new architectural features have been added. Louvers integrated into the façade. Large windows will overlook the River.

Larry Field, staff recommends conditional approval. Department of Public Works completed the review which allows the Planning Board, who is the permit granting authority, to vote on this petition. This is a great potential for this project to transfer the area along the River. The project will benefit the area. Limitation of lighting to the south of the site, parking will be moved more towards the building. Ann approval of the Conservation Commission is needed. We are concerned with visual screening of the penthouse for rooftop mechanical. One of the conditions is pedestrian access to Pleasant Street.

Gideon Schreiber, we have received a question from Susan Ladue, is the existing structure exempt from solar energy requirements? Yes, the building is exempt though we encourage use of solar panels.

Jeff Brown, is the building presently empty? There will be many cars parked in the lot, are they going to be coming/leaving at the same time?

Marcie Loeber, the building is 100% empty, the last tenant moved this week.

David Godfrey, the building is steel and concrete.

Hugh Hahn, parking ratio is 1.6 per 1000, we are expecting 280 people in the building when complete. The # of parking spaces for a building of this site is approximate. Lab building occupants disperse over couple of hours. One lane is in, two lanes are out.

Gideon Schreiber, this site always had the same level of parking.

Jeff Brown, underground utilities is very smart, parking might be a problem.

Payson Whitney, the submitted plans are showing sea of parking spaces, how much traffic goes to Paramount? Can some of the utility poles be removed? Interior lighting should be on timers to prevent lighting impact on abutters.

Gideon Schreiber, some of the poles were supposed to be removed by Russo's when they received their 2011/2012 permit, they were supposed to coordinate with the utility companies.

Jason Cohen, this site has a great potential for connection to the path, bridge and beyond.

Janet Buck, everything proposed by this project is improvement, it will allow access to the River, etc.

Janet Buck motioned that the Planning Board approves the Special Permit to allow site alterations including parking lot reconstruction, stormwater management improvements, increase pervious and landscaped area on the site, addition of mechanical equipment and a penthouse to the roof, pedestrian path along Charles River and a reduced parking under Sections 9.05 & 5.16(h)(3) based upon the finding that it meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance subject to conditions set forth in the staff report.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

- **311 Arsenal Street;** ARE-NA Region No.75, LLC – Final Site Plan Review

Payson Whitney, I made a disclosure in writing to the Town Manager that I am a direct abutter to this parcel. It will not have any effect on my vote on this petition.

Dante Angelucci, ARE-NA, we have an excellent relationship with neighbors. We are proposing minor amendment to previously approval of Athena Master Plan. Alexandria purchased the entire complex converting some buildings to Life Science uses. More open space will be created, and surface parking reduced.

John Sullivan, Architect, we are proposing 2-story addition at 100 Talcott Avenue and 1-story loading dock. This will improve the pedestrian experience, create courtyard between the buildings, equipment will be screened behind shrubbery. Glass covered canopy was proposed in 2016, we are now proposing more open space and connector element. This design will help with circulation and solves accessibility. Loading dock will be added including accessible pedestrian space. Some parking spaces will be taken out and historic building connection created. The space will be clear of mechanical equipment. The loading area will be placed between 100 & 200 Talcott Avenue. We are trying to be sensitive to the neighbors. Some parking spaces will be removed, and more plantings added.

Jeff Brown, it will a one way in each direction for the loading dock? Access to the courtyard will be only for people in the building?

Dante Angelucci, when the site changed in 1980s vehicular access was eliminated. There is not much of the activity, there will be strict rules regarding deliveries. The courtyard is not being used now but it is an important element for the tenants. Many of the building are being converted to Lab space.

Gideon Schreiber, few conditions need to be clarified. Rhododendrons along the fence will provide buffer for the neighbor. The connector is independent structure. The impact on the historic structures will be minimal. Staff recommends approval of the proposed amendment.

Janet Buck, the submitted plans do not match the elevations. More landscape on the public side would be preferable.

Dante Angelucci, we will be responsive to neighbor concerns, preserve historic structures. There are existing utilities in the area. No additional office will be provided in the connector.

Payson Whitney, this proposal is vast improvement over the previous glass connector. Deliveries should be limited to 7am to 7 pm. What is the dormer on top of 100 Talcott Ave?

John Sullivan, the dormer houses ventilation equipment.

Jason Cohen, I like the architectural approach and creation of outdoor seating areas.

Dante Angelucci, we have a website where everyone can express their concerns. Some areas were contaminated and there are no plans for change. We encourage people to go to the lawn area.

Janet Buck motioned that the Planning Board approves the Special Permit under Sections 5.12, 5.12(i)(6), 9.03, 9.05(b) for 100 Talcott Avenue (aka 311 Arsenal Street) and a minor amendment to the AODD Campus Special Permit to add a 2-story addition to the existing building at 100 Talcott Avenue, and a 1-story loading dock addition to the south wing of the existing building based upon the finding that it meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance subject to conditions set forth in the staff report.

Payson Whitney seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

OTHER BUSINESS

Jeff Brown adjourned the meeting at 10:25 pm.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 10:25 PM MINUTES APPROVED: _____

For more detailed Minutes see the DVD dated 3/10/2021 available in the DCD&P office.