

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: March 8, 2023 PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Regular Monthly Meeting

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

Gideon Schreiber, we would like to acknowledge Jeff Brown, Chair, who resigned this month after serving on the Planning Board for over 21 years. We appreciate his leadership.

Janet Buck, Jeff provided great influence and we would like to thank him for his service.

Abigail Hammett, I have known Jeff since I was in elementary school. He encouraged me to become an architect.

Nancy Hammett, I have known Jeff for a long time. He shared years of expertise on this Board and was committed to this community. He was a demanding professional and good friend.

Gideon Schreiber, the Board needs to select a new chair, anyone interested?

Janet Buck, I am very interested in being the next Chair.

Jason Cohen motioned to nominate Janet Buck as the new Chair of the Planning Board
Payson Whitney seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In favor

Payson Whitney motioned to approve Minutes of the January 11, 2023 meeting,
Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In favor

PUBLIC HEARING

- Watertown Zoning Ordinance Map Amendment to apply the **Religious/School Building Overlay District (R/SOD) to 126-134 Templeton Parkway**

Julien Lewis, Eagerbrook Capital LLC, we are applying for the R/SOD to allow the new owners to redevelop the property.

Jonathan Silverstein, Atty, representing the applicant. Eagerbrook Capital LLC. The church has been used as a church for many decades. The Church is now ready to sell, the building is over 100 years old and as is, its difficult to repurpose. RSOD was created to encourage redevelopment of old churches and school buildings. In order to preserve the church building and provide flexibility with reuses, SPR will be required. It is difficult to redevelop the church for housing, there is no elevator in the 3-story structure.

Hans Strauch, Architect, we are presenting a plan, showing the proposed 5 townhouses, additional parking, all subject to required zoning. The design is complimentary to the church building. We do not have specific use for the church building, possibly daycare. We are looking for a use that would provide longevity. It is an interesting site that has many challenges. We are looking at shared parking scenario during the night, during the day to be used as commercial use.

Janet Buck, Chair, any proposed commercial uses will require elevator as well.

Payson Whitney, what will happen if the proposed amendment is not approved? The current zoning is 2 family. Will the church be demolished, and 2-family houses built? It would be much less flexible.

Gideon Schreiber, the site will be made into subdivision, each new parcel would be 7,500 s.f..

Abigail Hammett, in either case, permission from the city will be needed.

Jonathan Silverstein, we are committed to save the church but as it is it would not allow any flexibility. It would be more economically beneficial to demolish the church building.

Hans Strauch, the church 3 levels, 9,000 s.f., would pose a significant challenge to use the building as a daycare.

Gideon Schreiber, overlay is intended to preserve historic existing structures, to provide flexibility. All properties in Watertown more than 50 years old have 2 year demolish delay. The overlay applied to Coolidge School, church at School/Mt Auburn, St Patrick school etc. The 1920 structure was built as a church. It meets the criteria, this is what overlay was designed for. The property is adjacent to the commercial zone on Belmont Street, staff recommends approval. This is a zoning amendment proposal, not a specific project. The petitioner must come back before the Boards with a proposal.

Greg, 108 Templeton Parkway, will the townhouses be built first before the church is preserved? Are we giving up control over that, will it be difficult once the amendment is approved?

Nadia Karnik, there is major traffic on Belmont Street already, this project will have additional impact.

Jason Cohen, when there is a project, it will have to come back to the Planning Board. People will have the opportunity to express their concern.

.....DeSouza, 210 Belmont Street, we will lose green space. The sketch is showing townhouses, but it could be businesses with more traffic. Can the city purchase the property and preserve the green space?

Gideon Schreiber, the overlay would allow businesses, but Templeton Parkway is too narrow which would be difficult scenario for trucks. Each use has different parking requirements. Tonight is not about development.

S.Mooney, 42 Salisbury, I have lived here for 7 years and grew up in the area. Something like this would impact the area. I am worried about parking next to the townhouses, it will impact the neighborhood.

Janet Buck, when the developer brings the project to the Boards, they will have to provide a traffic study that will be reviewed.

Jane Faccenda, 42-44 Woodleigh Rd, I have lived in this area for a long time. Is this overlay going to open the door for developments? The church is a beautiful building that should be restored. Traffic in this area is already horrible, this is not an area where we need more cars.

Angie Kounelis, 55 Keenan St/former Town Council member, I had a conversation with Director of Community Development & Planning Steve Magoon regarding preserving green space. Does this amendment go with the applicant or does it stay with the property. There are major issues with this intersection. Any driveway leading into it would be a hazard. The city should consider retaining the front green space.

Gideon Schreiber, this amendment will go with the property.

Hans Strauch, the agreement between the property owner and the developer is not contingent on this amendment. We are planning to purchase the property this summer.

Josh Rosmarin, 29 Ashland Street, approving the RSOD is the best way to improve this property and restore the church.

Len Holt, 137-141 Templeton Parkway, my property is located directly across from the church. I am for the zone change, the building is a mess but 2 family homes would be preferable. There are many businesses across the street, but this is a residential neighborhood.

Libby Shaw, 73 Templeton Pkwy, it is important to preserve the green space. It is important to increase residential density, but we also must preserve green space and trees. This site has exceptionally healthy soil, community gardens or public park would be beneficial for residents. There is less violence when people can see trees.

Janet Buck, tomorrow night is an opportunity for residents to Comprehensive plan and address these issues.

Jeanie Johnson, 12 Green St, we need to preserve this open space. The site would be perfect for community gardens.

Tod/Janet Gross, 210 Belmont St, we do need more housing, but green space is also needed, this is a dilemma.

Jason Cohen, this amendment is to consider change from 2 family to RSOD zone. What is next we do not know. I would prefer to wait until we have a specific project and then ask all the questions.

Peggy Demuth, 210 Belmont Street, if the church sells the property now, it could be 2 family homes or daycare. Would this overlay district allow businesses?

Adarsha Bajracharya, 210 Belmont St, my neighbors raised concerns about this property, we need to preserve green space.

Marlene Rubin, 210 Belmont St, my bedroom window faces the proposed parking lot. If the church provides the daycare, there will not be any outside space. Traffic and noise are also a concern.

Libby Shaw, the church can be demolished and a 1 story daycare with playground is build. I encourage to keep the zoning as is.

Gideon Schreiber, if the overlay amendment is not enacted, schools of any size can be built under the existing zoning. The use can be more intense, much higher structure, etc.

Elodia Thomas, the church is a 9,000 s.f., 3 story structure. The existing zoning is limited, if the property is rezoned, the value will increase.

Gideon Schreiber, this amendment is not for the developer to increase profit, it is for the church to allow to reuse the property.

Janet Buck closed the public hearing at 8:25 pm.

Jason Cohen, passing this change would allow the church to reuse the property otherwise it is unlikely that the property/church will be restored. If this is not recommended the structure will not be preserved.

Payson Whitney, we are making a recommendation to the City Council. When going forward we can ask the City Council to explore purchase of the property. The amendment will increase the value of the property.

Abigail Hammett, if not approved, it does not mean that there is not the possibility of the church not being preserved.

Janet Buck, the site will have more flexibility if we recommend this overlay. No matter what happens there will be more traffic. The overlay will allow the developer to look at different options.

Payson Whitney motioned to recommend to the City Council approval of the Amendment to the Watertown Zoning Ordinance Map to apply the Religious/School Building Overlay District (R/SOD) to 126-134 Templeton Parkway based upon the finding that it meets criteria set forth in the staff report and to advise the City Council to look into the purchase of the property.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In Favor

- Watertown Zoning Ordinance Amendment requiring an **Affordable Housing Linkage Fee**. Amendments to be considered add language as necessary, including to Section 5.01, notes relating to the Table of Use Regulations, and to Section 5.07, relating to establishment of a linkage fee, for new non-residential development of 30,000 square feet or greater to fund affordable housing in Watertown.

Larry Field, this amendment would establish linkage fee to provide affordable housing. The city retained consulting services and the proposed draft Ordinance was completed in January. It will help the city with creation of affordable housing. It will affect new commercial development, additions to existing buildings. It will exclude the residential portion of mixed-use development. Fee will be adjusted annually, the payment will not be due until occupancy certificate is granted. The proposed fee will allow Watertown to be competitive, there will not be significant impact.

Payson Whitney, the requirement would be set as a condition. The fee will go into Housing Trust fund. The cash flow cannot be planned until is known which building will be purchased. Cambridge started with \$12 in 2015, and now is \$33. The base amount of \$11.12 is part of the NEXUS study which was done in May 2022. It should be based on inflation rates.

Janet Buck, how many sites are left in Watertown that would accommodate 30,000 s.f. building?

Larry Field, the City Manager recommended this number based on changes in the economy. There is a number of projects coming up that will be over 100,000 s.f.. February 2 was the first notice of this amendment. Any developer who had a project in Watertown in the last 18 months did anticipate this change.

Abigail Hammett, how will the money be used to provide affordable housing?

Larry Field, the trust will have to rely on state & federal subsidy. Both will require local matches. First, we will look for a nonprofit developer, then apply to local agency such as CPC (Community Preservation Committee) or the Trust will look for a partner. It is expensive to build affordable housing.

Jason Cohen, CPC has a substantial amount of money.

Greg Reibman, President Charles River Regional Chamber, we support affordable housing, but we want to caution the city to be thoughtful about implementing the linkage program given the resent economic situation such as rising interest rates, material shortages and weakening demand for lab space. Some of the surrounding communities do not have linkage fees and are more attractive to developers. Construction starts are down due to the costs, vacancy rates are growing. Most clients would like to give 35% of the space back. We are proposing adjustments to the proposed amendments:

1. Delay linkage fees until 2024
2. Phase linkage fees
3. We recommend payments over 5-year period, it would give the City opportunity to budget the housing – Boston has over 7 year period

Bob Doherty, less than 3 years ago, we came to the Planning Board for 66 Galen Street project. We do not have tenants yet, due to the high interest rates, pandemic and supply issues, construction costs increased by 20%. 99 Water Street which is next continues expansion of costs and has many challenges. Housing crises represent threats to our workers.

Alejandro Miranda, Boylston Properties, we are in support of affordable housing. Many projects are now down, we hope that the proposed changes will be taken into consideration.

Clifford Cook, Chair Affordable Housing Trust, we are allowed to acquire property by virtue of having funds, local match is important. Linkage will be dedicated to affordable housing. I understand the developers' concerns but there are buildings being build. This is an opportunity to provide affordable housing in Watertown. A letter from the Affordable Housing Trust was submitted tonight.

Josh Rosmarin, 29 Ashland St, I appreciate the great presentation by Larry Field. The need for affordable housing is here, cities like Boston & Cambridge have done it. The Planning Board should move it to the City Council.

Marci Loeber, 580 Pleasant St, I am in support of the housing amendment, adjustments can be made. We are also competing with Newton, Waltham, Burlington, etc.

Larry Field, delaying the amendment for a year the impact would be minimal. If delayed, the City would be at a disadvantage, will lose time and it would make it harder to catch up. One payment is important, we don't want to change the developer for monthly payments. new housing cannot give priority to Watertown residents. The City Manager promised \$250,000 that will be appropriated into the next budget for an affordable trust fund account.

Jason Cohen, are people who live in Watertown a priority? Housing has been critical for a long time, we will not compete with Boston and Cambridge. I don't want to scare the developers.

Abigail Hammett, I agree with Jason, we need more affordable housing, but we need to find a balance. If the developments slow down, no money will be coming into the Trust Fund. The study considered the economic climate. How does the money translate into unit amount? We might not be able to count on this study. We need more discussion about relief linkage fee if the developer provides mixed rental units in lieu of linkage payment.

Gideon Schreiber, if there are suggestions for different linkage, could that be considered. The Planning Board is making a recommendation to the City Council, it does not have to be the same as the staff report. The Planning Board will make a motion and we can add it to the report to the City Council.

Payson Whitney, this amendment is about affordable housing, decision should be made without a delay. City Councilors might be listening tonight.

Jason Cohen, we can continue the request until next month, or we can implement one of the 3 suggestions tonight, I feel more comfortable recommending one of the suggestions.

Gideon Schreiber, we can provide the Planning Board with language to make recommendations to the City Council.

Abigail Hammett, I am comfortable with staff making alternate methods.

Payson Whitney motioned to recommend to the City Council approval of the proposed Affordable Housing Linkage Fee Amendment including to Section 5.01, notes relating to the Table of Use Regulations, and to Section 5.07, relating to establishment of a linkage fee, for new non-residential development of 30,000 square feet or greater to fund affordable housing in Watertown as written in the staff report and to investigate the spread out payment schedule, the developer providing unit in lieu of linkage fee payment.

Jason seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 in favor

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 10:15 pm.