

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: July 12, 2023 PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

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

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Payson Whitney motioned to approve Minutes of the June 14, 2023 meeting,

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In favor

PUBLIC HEARING

- **705 Mt Auburn St & 64 Grove St** – 705 Mt Auburn LLC c/o Spear Street Capital & 64 Grove LLC c/o Spear Street Capital

Michael Rak, Senior VP, we have received conditional approval in 2021. The property was neglected office campus, this proposal is the last piece of a puzzle to showcase this as a center of technology. The proposed signage will provide consistent identification, wayfinding and directional signage for the campus, in keeping with the Design Guidelines.

Steve, Architect, this beautiful old building will be given new life. The art deco style structure had several additions. The site will have comprehensive improvement to the landscaping. Parking in the rear is converted to landscape area is heart of the campus. Intense mechanical equipment is concealed. There are several types of signs – building signs, tenant signs and site signs. This is 12.5 acre campus that has 5 entrances, 64 Grove Street has 2 entrances. There will be multiple tenants and strategy was developed to create signage. Building signage will be placed by main entrance, 400 feet from Grove Street, signs will be placed above the entrance. We were finding harmony in proportion, not to be lost from the street, neon style numbers, mounted on top of canopy. Vertical elements with art work. The building is setback 75 feet from Mt. Auburn Street, 1'2" letters with mounted letters at 64 Grove Street. There will be 2 entrances to the garage with a signage not illuminated. Tenant signage will have expression of their identity. The size dependent's on how many major tenants are in the building. Main entrance will have space for the campus and the tenants.

Jonathan Bryant, Designer, this project presented few challenges. The buildings have multiple entrances, historically the main entrances were on Mt Auburn Street. A campus atmosphere was created now. A visual disconnect near the cemetery. The brand WELL will be brought to the primary area (Watertown Exploratory Labs). This is a scale down version, signs are illuminated. Directory signage is designed the same way.

Gideon Schreiber, some signage is allowed by right, this is the entire sign package. The building has unusual scape, the package is more consolidated. The building has large façade, they are proposing specific sign locations. Some criteria are more RMUD. Staff report looks at standard and RMUD criteria. What they are asking for is consistent with the Zoning Ordinance. We have discussed sign being on the wall instead of projecting signs. The criteria in the report is compliant, one condition has been added. Conditions are for this package only.

Jason Cohen, is this the first signage Master Plan that is not in the overlay district?

Gideon Schreiber, yes, it is submitted as part of the Special Permit process. Planning Board is the permit granting authority for Special Permit approval. Different projects have different needs, it all depends on the site.

Janet Buck, in addition to the garage there are couple of areas for service parking.

Michael Rak, wayfinding signage will be shown at the main entrance. Cars are not allowed to turn left between the building and the cemetery. The artwork already started on the tower.

Abigail Hammett, I have noticed exclusion of some signage in this package, I would like to see it as well.

Gideon Schreiber, the Board allowed that the staff could review the secondary package. It includes series of smaller signage toward the Greenway.

Bill York, Atty, we will submit it to the Board. Typically, that is submitted to the staff.

Abigail Hammett, the package does not have to be formal. Are there any guidelines about colors or materials? There is little control about the size of tenant signage on Mt Auburn Street.

Steve, sometimes the tenant signage can be challenging. Landlord has the ultimate approval. If a tenant takes large portion of the building, they might get primary area for signage.

Michael Rak, we tell tenants that their signage has to be consistent, it would only go to a tenant worthy of such signage. We are going to try to control very carefully.

Gideon Schreiber, all that information gets submitted as part of the building permit. We will get clarity about the sizes, colors, lights, heights, etc. We have specifications that have to be met, which is not shown in this package. We will have high quality signage subject to municipality approval.

Bill York, this is a signature building in Watertown, highly professional. Sign ordinance has guidelines and staff interprets those. Every sign will be submitted to staff for their approval.

Payson Whitney, I agree with Abby and Jason. Lower sign for tenants makes more sense. It will brand the tenant as part of the campus. How much can you see from the road? The monument sign - how will you know that you have to enter from Grove Street? Why black and white? The wall next to the main entrance could be a place to name the tenants.

Steve, the signs were designed in context of the mural. Some tenants would like to have their identity on Mt.Auburn Street, it would be of great value to them.

Janet Buck, I agree with Payson, we need to have identifying sign.

Jason Cohen, this was a great presentation, lots thought behind it. I have a strong feeling about not putting large sign on the tower, inserted into the brick. If tenants leave, we want to make sure that the brick does not get damaged. We anticipate public comment about the building signage. My inclination is not to allow 80 sq.ft. sign.

Steve, this is a 550 sq.ft. building, it gives it desirability to tenants. Location of the sign is important to tenants who feel that they should have large size signage.

Gideon Schreiber, signs provide guidance to where the entrance is, corner sign does not do anything.

Michael Rak, if you have a tenant who lease the entire first floor, they will insist on primary location for signage. I have no problem to reduce the sign from 80 sf to 50 sf.

Abigail Hammett, I agree with Jason, large sign is fine just limit the color palate, giving that this is historic building. We do not want the building to stay empty. This building is not protected as historical.

Libby Shaw, I support Jason's concerns, this building has beautiful façade on Mount Auburn Street. Great place to have a permanent sign for the building. It is important to minimize such signage. The signage in front should be smaller and lower.

Abigail Hammett, I appreciate sign scale but do not like branding monument signs, they are too busy. It looks like entrance to a nightclub, it could use some editing.

Michael Rak, this is an old building that does not have much glass. We have picked some design that is bold.

Gideon Schreiber, we have specifications about mounting into the mortar not into the brick. The tenant has to submit a form and owner has to sign it. All small details are important. Edges of tenant signs should remain black/white.

Janet Buck, I see this as a pattern in Watertown, opening sites to public visually, etc. This was challenging site, the developer did a good job.

Jason Cohen, the proposed sign should be 50 sf, signs would be fastened into mortar, staff would review and approve the final signage.

Abigail Hammett, appropriate neutral colors should be used, leave final review to the staff. Limit number of colors to the greatest extent possible.

Payson Whitney motioned that the Planning Board recommends to the City Council conditional approval for the request of two Sign Special Permits, one for each property, to allow a sign master plan under Section 9.05, based on the finding that the proposed projects meets the criteria set forth under Section 7.00 for sign permits and 9.05, and with the general purpose of the Ordinance outlined in Section 1.00 of the Watertown Zoning Ordinance with conditions set forth in the staff report, and that for building 705 Mount Auburn Street signs only be fastened to the mortar, not the brick; that the number of colors on tenant signs shall be limited to the greatest extent feasible with staff review; the maximum size of sign #6A shall be no larger than 50 s.f.; the side profile color of sign 6A & 6B shall be limited to be either black or white; with staff review.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In favor

OTHER

Comprehensive Plan Update

Gideon Schreiber, the Committee met on Monday. The next step is special joint meeting of Planning Board and City Council to accommodate 5 and 9 members, the vote will be separate. The final report might take a while, we will let you know when draft is posted.

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 9:25 pm.