

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: October 11, 2023 PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

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

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Jason Cohen motioned to approve Minutes of the 9/13/2023 meeting.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In favor

CASES PENDING

550 Arsenal St (and 446, 458, 500 & 550 Arsenal St) – Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Inc

Janet Buck, significant changes were made by Alexandria regarding the Watertown Mall project since the last presentation.

Ricky Golden, Alexandria, we are excited about the changes, residential building has been added, more retail space as well, new landscaping, café, and safety improvements for the Greenway. In order for the project to be viable, parking is essential. This project will bring many good things to Watertown.

Adrian Nial, the project consists of 4 parcels, the space will remain the same, there are number of improvements. We are proposing three types of landscaping.

Victor Pechaty, there are different uses proposed for the site. A2 is restaurant facility that can be reserved by site residents. R1 is retail space with 5-6 stories residential structure. Blue dots on the plan define transparent area. Retail program is oriented on the site, smaller retailer providing residential amenities.

Adrian Nial, we are trying to balance the traffic, having buffer, inviting public onto the site, creating welcoming entry, generous walks and have bike paths throughout the site. Landscaping shown is 20 years old, we are thing about the future. Mature oak trees will be saved, landscape destinations provided and new walkways from Greenway added. We are proposing superior access from the neighborhood.

Taylor, we will contribute scale mass for the site. It will be active center to the site.

Adrian Nial, we are proposing multiple micro forests on the site, and create micro forest island. Natural play area will be created. Plazas are designed to have lots of flexibility, event lawn with picnic tables under the trees, all open to the public. Expanded public arts program to invite public to the site and to make landscape more civic. Interpreted signage to tell history of the site.

Victor Pechaty, there will be 3 office/lab buildings, OL1 building is 5 story plus the penthouse. It is very intense building, all the buildings are setback minimum of 30 feet from the property line. It will be enhancement to the neighborhood. The penthouse has a 10 foot setback, additional 10 ft is proposed for a total of 20 feet.

Scott, OL2 & OL3, we are sensitive to the setback, trying to integrate the penthouse. At the ground level, the building setback is 11, 25 & 35 feet, 35 feet from property line on Arsenal Street. We are trying to minimize the building size by proposing further setbacks.

Jeffrey Durk, VHB, not much has changed. We are proposing retail and mixed use. Residential use generates less traffic than retail. This site is walkable and bikeable. There will be shuttle service from and to the site, 3 modes of public transportation. We will have several electric charging stations and 2 blue bike stations. We will be member of the TMA, incentives will be provided. We will have raised crossings, enhanced signs, rapid flashing radar type of detector that will activate lights. Path and street lighting at crosswalks will provide safety for pedestrians and bicycles.

Ricky Golden, we are proposing enough parking for site residents/tenants so that there is no need to park in abutting neighborhoods. The ratio is 2.05, we cannot go any lower.

Victor Pechaty, there is a phasing plan for the project. Phase I will be completion of the larger portion, buildings 2 & 3, A2 pavilion and parking structure. P2 garage is needed for tenants of OL2 & 3. Portion of R1 will be constructed to allow Registry to move in. The final phase will be P2 garage.

Larry Field, staff recommends conditional approval for this site and for the ZBA to approve 480 Arsenal Street. The proposed project meets the criteria, the site is appropriate for mixed use development as recommended by the 2015 and 2023 Comprehensive Plan as well as Master Plan. The proposed heights of the structures are appropriate. This will be a lively location, it will not adversely affect the neighborhood. This is an opportunity to mitigate impacts of the campus. Traffic study shows trade-off of traffic moving peak versus trips during the weekend. A concern regarding cars at freeway crossing, proposed measurements will be effective. Project meets or exceeds zoning requirements. TDM plan is designed to reduce requirements for single occupied vehicles. We do not want to have too much or not enough parking. Petitioner addressed concerns about drawing in. Preliminary phasing plan is logical. The petitioner will work with the Affordable housing trust. More detail will be provided at the next hearing.

Janet Buck, it is 8 PM and we welcome public comments, we also have about 30 residents online.

Tom, Chester Street, we would like to thank the Planning Board for requesting additional housing, there is an extreme need in Watertown.

Sam, we appreciate the additional housing, there are 88 units proposed for this 25 acre site, 20% if single family homes were build. We are in housing crisis, this site is the largest in our 4.5 square mile City.

Deb Peterson, Westland Rd, this is an impressive undertaking. TDM goals are base line, we need to look to the future, we need more road improvements, we should be able to operate with fewer cars.

Merill, Arlington St, with so many labs, we should bring some of the scientists to Watertown High School. It would enable our students to want to participate.

Amy Plovnick, 29 Ashland St, we are excited about housing that was added to this development. Traffic light needs to be added to all the crossings.

Paul Pavone, International Union, we are representing many Watertown residents, they should be given the opportunity to work on a local project.

Armand, Pleasant Street, what will be the cost of the residential units, \$ 4,000 for 1 bedroom unit is not affordable.

Jamie, this should be a gateway to Watertown, here is a potential for lot of affordable housing. The triangular portion of the parcel should be utilized.

George Skuse, to utilize that area would be beneficial.

Linda Scott, 55 Olcott St, I agree that the area should be done. The housing in these development is very expensive and rent goes up every year, prices need to be stabilized.

Charles Reynolds, is the Registry going to stay? There are 15 traffic lights from Watertown Square to the Arsenal. Vehicles will be added by this development, there will not be 40% reduction, how can you reduce something that is already overloaded? The architecture of structures in other Towns resembles communities.

Ernesta Karcz....., 77 Riverside St, it is very hard to do any reduction in single vehicle traffic, we need dedicated bus lanes. The proposed garages are very large, the younger generation does not want cars.

Libby Shaw, I would like to thank Alexandria for envisioning increase of green space and to make the site more accessible to the public. Alexandria does not focus on housing so this project is the first. We do appreciate the additional green space.

Josh Matloft, 19 Stuart St, this is a step in the right direction to add housing, but this is not enough. The units are very high market rates. This campus will add 1000 new jobs. Target building height is low, could that be increased to add more housing?

Cathy, how long will it take for the project to complete? If I go to eat to a restaurant, I don't feel safe to park in a garage.

Brian Hebeisen, there have been many changes in this presentation, more housing added. We should look at transportation/parking in 15 years. Major manufacturers are looking into EV vehicles in the next years, the number of charging stations need to increase.

Jacky Van Leeuw, I spoke with some companies that are looking for more workers the addition of daycare would be beneficial.

Ricky Golden, each phase will take about 2 years. The Target surface spaces will remain.

Janet Buck, at this time 8:45, the public testimony will close at this time.

Jason Cohen, this was an excellent presentation. The pocket park will not work, it would not be maintained or used, housing would not be possible. Penthouse will have setbacks but the height should be added to the building height. We need to take a step to benefit our citizens and community.

I am concerned about the parking. Many of these garages may be empty in the next 20 years. \$8 million linkage fee will help our affordable housing

Gideon Schreiber, garage at AOTC was built for the office space, some of the surface space was removed to create plaza.

Ricky Golden, we feel that we are just below where we should be with the parking ratio.

Rachael Sack, many improvements have been made, the City is involved with the public arts also. Handicapped accessibility is important, it will be addressed during Site Plan review. I like to see more use of retail space.

Abigail Hammett, the parking around Target belongs to them, what is happening with Best Buy? I would prefer other retail space instead of the Best Buy. Would be nice to have less parking. I am concerned with crossings, encourage people to use different garage parking, maybe close couple of floors. I would be open to increase height of the building and provide more housing. Linkage fee is an opportunity for in lieu to get more housing sooner. The proposed changes made the project stronger.

Payson Whitney, I would like to thank the developer for being responsive and to mix housing and lab space in the buildings, uses are compatible. I am concerned with the Greenway access, there is a potential for accidents to happen. Could some below level parking be created? I like the creativity with the setback of the penthouse reducing the mass. Buildings in Watertown are too boxy, we need more edginess.

Janet Buck, this was a much improved presentation but there is always more space for improvement. When I was working and my children were younger, it was easiest to drive. It was different when they got older. Not many young people are buying cars.

Payson Whitney motioned to continue the above petition to November 8, 2023 Planning Board meeting. Jason Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In favor

313 & 275 Pleasant Street, 84-86 Rosedale Road, 60 Acton Street

Janet Buck, we do not have staff report, we will hear the presentation, but the Planning Board will not vote tonight.

Eric Spencer, Broder Co, our company was founded 17 years ago, we are very concerned with sustainability. Our first project in Cambridge had LEED platinum standard. We have purchased the Canistraro property 2 years ago, it is not zoned residential. Our projects included hotel in North Adam, Sears building in Fenway, redevelopment of Filenes building in Boston. We have worked with communities, which was an important part of the process. There have been some heated exchanges, we take our role as neighbor seriously and are always available. Our Lab/Science project will provide strong economic base in Watertown. We will provide many charging stations, which is a cleaner energy source. Our building will be all electric.

David, CBT, we are architects and interior designers. This is a unique site, 20% of open space. The community does not want access from Acton Street. We are proposing series of different type of

landscape throughout the site. Safe environment at night, outdoor parking for bikes. Height of the garage will be reduced, 25 foot setback from the edge for the mechanical equipment.

We have worked with Council President Sideris, Councilor Emily Rizzo. The only access on access is for Fire Trucks, vehicular traffic on Acton can handle cars but not trucks. We are proposing 2 access points to Charles River. We hope that this will be the most sustainable building in Watertown.

Janet Buck, we will open for public comment.

Linda Scott, this is a big building, we need larger setbacks. The structures on Arsenal Street have 30 foot setback, this developer is proposing 20 feet only.

Eric Spencer, we looked at shadow studies, this setback is sufficient.

George Skuse, I have several concerns about this project, especially setbacks and height of the building. There was a widespread opposition at the community meetings. The amount of noise and vibration was questioned, noise from the generation, this is a residential area. A letter from Newton residents on the other side of Charles River was received regarding noise from developments on Pleasant Street in Watertown. This is a primary example of turning back on residential neighborhood.

Joan Gumbleton, 33 Falmouth Road, I would like to thank Broder for listening to our concerns. Larger setback on Acton St is needed, 50 feet, that would provide more space for trees. Central Rock Gym is not included in the landscape plan. We are concerned with EV and electric bikes that can spontaneously catch on fire.

Eric Spencer, tonight's submission does not include the gym. This is a brand new building and equipment, sound and noise should not be a problem. This is commercial/industrial zone, it does abuts homes, there will be some impact. Overflow of the Gym customer can park in our garage.

Brian Hebeisen, 170 Worcester, member of the energy committee, we would like to meet with the developer.

Linda Scott, Canistraro, was not 24 hour operation. Many people will be affected by this operation.

Libby Shaw, this is not my neighborhood, it is an industrial/commercial zone. Quality of life needs to be taken into consideration. I am surprised that Newton residents are complaining about Pleasant Street.

Brian Wyncoop, 46 Rosedale, I live across the street from this project. 50 foot buffer was setup specifically as transition zone.

Eddie, Acton Street, my biggest concern is with shadow from this building.

Elodia Thomas, I don't remember the first presentation. One side of the street will be repaired by the developer, the other side should be done by the City, some trees could be planted. We have been asking for noise Ordinance for years, it needs to be done, what is the impact of HVAC units in the entire City.

Joe Hardy, Rock Gym, I was in front of the Board twice with my business, it was a very negative experience. There is a positive impact from the residents now. The developer offers parking in the

garage for my customers. There is no clear answer on what is best for the community. This project will make the site better, I live on Point Street in Watertown.

Owen Murphy, it should have 50 foot setback or maybe the buildings should be smaller.

Elodia Thomas, the community attends more meeting than the Planning Board, The Board does not know what changed, what was improved. They should take a stand with the noise Ordinance.

George Skuse, the surface parking could provide additional open space.

Janey Buck closed the public testimony at 10:40.

Janet Buck, I see this as a big improvement from the existing conditions. I read the Newton letter, I borrowed the decibel meter at the Watertown Library and visited several Lab sites. The noise level was fine. This is not a good reason not to approve a project.

Payson Whitney, I often feel rushed with these large projects. I attended July community meeting, I live 300 feet from the Watertown Mall. We need to have another look at transition zones. Will this project be detrimental to the neighborhood? Maybe more separation on Acton Street is needed. Could one of the parking level be put underground ? Renderings do not always show color palette. Given this location, noise study would be helpful.

Eric Spencer, we can accommodate the materials/colors, we encourage people to look at our other projects.

Abigail Hammett, more setbacks on Acton Street are needed, better use of seating area on Acton Street, more landscape added. Loading area should be moved closer to middle of the site, access from Rosedale instead of Pleasant Street.

Rachael Sack, a crosswalk on Pleasant Street is needed.

Gideon Schreiber, there is a problem with enough sidewalk width to create crosswalk. There are several options for setback on Acton St, it would allow the Board to request 50 feet, 30 feet on Pleasant Street.

Jason Cohen, the Newton letter might be concerned with specific issue on Pleasant Street.

Abigail Hammett motioned to continue the above petition to November 8, 2023 Planning Board meeting.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In favor

OTHER

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 11:20 pm.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 11:20 PM MINUTES APPROVED: _____