

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: May 21, 2015 PLACE: Town Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:05 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Special Meeting/Public Hearing

PRESENT: John Hawes, Chair, Linda Tuttle-Barletta; Fergal Brennock; Jeff Brown; Neal Corbett
Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner; Andrea Adams, Senior Planner

John Hawes, Chair, opened the meeting at 7:05 PM.

CASES PENDING

- [56-60 & 57 Irving Street and 122, 150, 160, 162 & 204 rear Arsenal Street;](#) B. Henry, Greystar GP II, LLC – Special Permit with Site Plan Review

John Hawes, this petition has been continued from May 13, 2015 meeting.

Attorney Christian Regnier, Goulston & Storrs, Civil Engineering and traffic impacts would be the main focus of the night's presentation.

Brandon Henry, Greystar, thanked the audience and the Board for their patience as the development team finished their project presentation. This is a very collaborative project. The project team has listened to the feedback over the two years of project refinement.

Steven Chinaurd, Allen & Major, there have been a few revisions to the plan since the last presentation. Frontage has been modified, to provide stop near the shared entrance driveway with the adjacent project. The bike path had been narrowed to accommodate a landscape strip, and the utility poles along Arsenal Street have been relocated out of the Community Path to along Arsenal Street. The pedestrian and vehicle connectivity in and around the site, particularly to Irving Street has been placed. The onsite storm water management systems, including planter areas and rooftop collection systems, have been created. There is essentially no onsite stormwater management system on site now, the reconstructed sewerage system and easement is presented tonight.

Jeffrey Dirk, Vanasse & Associates, the project's traffic assessment and anticipated transportation impacts and mitigation is shown. The comprehensive mitigation package for the project was up to \$1.25 million in improvements. There were two full traffic studies done on the project. One was done in February 2015 and a revised study was produced in March, 2015. A hallmark of the project was post-occupancy monitoring, which in practice meant that if the project was shown to have impacts in excess of the traffic study post occupancy, then the developer would take measures to address the impacts, including the potential for additional mitigation. A variety of colored slides are used to describe the study area, and the anticipated physical improvements. A series of slides to describe the Level of Service of studied intersections with and without the proposed project. The developer's proposed mitigation package includes a complete reconstruction of Irving Street, addition of traffic calming features along Irving Street, reconstruction of several intersections to accommodate bicycle and pedestrians, use of adaptive signal control at Watertown Square, proportional funding of a Transportation Management Association, and coordination of traffic signals along the Arsenal Street corridor.

Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner, an incomplete staff report was presented to the Board last month. More work was done with the Petitioner, Town Department of Public Work and through Design Review. The staff report has been updated to take account of these changes. The Design Guidelines and Standards are very relevant to this project. These are before the Town Council, although the hearing has not been scheduled. The project has been review with regard to the existing Zoning Ordinance and the proposed changes. A condition allowing flexibility with regard to the final zoning parking requirements has been added. The development complies with the draft Standards, such as reduced parking, increased bicycle parking, updated façade design, completion of a solar assessment, and LEED Certifiability prior to occupancy. The four Special Permit criteria have been met. The site is

appropriate for this project, and has been identified by the Comprehensive Plan for mixed use development. The project has substantial landscaping, and provides an extension of the Community Path, as well as moving utility poles to better accommodate the path. The site links to the development adjacent to it. There are substantial offsite improvements and roadway changes, parking would be under one building or screened. The project conditionally met Special Permit Criteria #2. Heavy industrial use and trucks were removed. A Community Park on the other side of Irving Street in place of a brick yard and tow truck storage. There is new pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to the neighborhood. Site infiltration has increased, and impacts to the Charles River decreased.

The third Special Permit Criterion is conditionally met and finalized through discussion with the Petitioner and Department of Public Works (DPW). Requirements for off-site improvements have been met. Onsite circulation issues have been addressed. Poles will be removed to improve accessibility to and from the sidewalk. East-West connection from Irving Street and the project approved to the East.

Criterion #4, which deals with utilities for proper operation is met. Substantial amount of onsite utility work is done more for the Town's benefit, such as the moving of the street lights. Poles are being moved to the front curb line which makes the Community Path safer. All required utility connections are provided. Landscape plan provided, and will be reviewed by staff.

Additional Site Plan Review criteria have been met. Preservation of landscaping: Existing cover consists largely of weed trees. Site will be substantially landscaped. Building relates to the environment. Good mix of commercial and residential. Substantial amount of access along the site. Siting of the building relates to the topography. Open space being provided, in concert with the building massing. New courtyards, new ½-acre Community Park. Courtyards face outward and circulation has been conditionally met. The project was redesigned to ensure safe vehicular and pedestrian access throughout the site. Site Plan Review Criterion #5 deals with surface water drainage and the design was reviewed by DPW. Significant stormwater management with new design is proposed. Utility service is conditionally met and requires final DPW review. Criterion #7 is environmental sustainability. Project is 20% pervious, substantial Low Impact Stormwater Management Design. LEED Certifiable is a condition of the project, as well as an energy assessment. The design will be solar ready. Criterion #8 is screening. Transformers and HVAC will be required to be screened by conditions. Criterion #9 is safety. The project meets all Building and Fire review and this criterion is conditionally met. Review for site lighting, and landscaping, and way-finding. Primary part of this criterion is dealt with by *Design Guidelines*.

The project meets the Affordable Housing requirements through conditions, providing 35 onsite units of various sizes. It has been reviewed by Watertown Housing Partnership. Sizes meet Department of Community Housing & Development minimums by condition since there are two proposed types of units that are too small to be in the mix as affordable apartments. Project will be rental. Units will be indistinguishable from market rate units. A proposed condition was added that would allow the project to be brought into compliance with the Watertown Zoning Ordinance based on the outcome of the process to adopt the draft *Design Guidelines and Standards*.

David Gamble, Gamble Associates, provided an overview of the *Design Guidelines* process and the project redesign. The project had undergone three major changes: A) creation of a cut-through in the building, B) creation of a height profile that is tied to the site topography, and C) an activated corner at Irving and Arsenal Streets.

John Hawes, what is the maximum length of the project? It appears that the maximum building façade will be longer than 300 feet. The developer should be commended for going forward with the project while the design standards in Watertown were changing. There should be a clear reference in the

Planning Board report to the requirements for a Special Permit related to a longer building façade. I suggest to the Petitioner that the bridge feature should be more of a curtain wall construction. How will visitor parking be handled?

Tom Shultz, tat, said there were 11 visitor parking spaces that will be clearly marked and signed as for visitors.

Fergal Brennock, I am concerned about the traffic impacts and the Level of Service (LOS) at Irving and Arsenal Streets. The LOS seemed to be dropping with the project in place. What is the width of Irving Street and parking? There is a house on the Mount Auburn side that has drop-off and causes a pinch point. Is the width large enough with parking?

Jeffrey Dirk, Vanasse & Associates, Hannover-Cresset would make some roadway improvements, and the Petitioner's project would also be making some additional improvements. The LOS was expressed seven years in the future. We suggest that besides the LOS letter grade, the queues and travel times will be improved. Once cars get onto Arsenal Street, the traffic stream will improve. Uniformity would be made to the cross-section along the street. Parking along Irving would be shifted, creating a parking chicane, jockeying it from side to side, to reduce speeds.

Gideon Schreiber, the parking situation on Irving Street would also be a Town Traffic Commission issue. The Town is aware of the narrow Right of Way on Irving Street and at the intersection with Arsenal Street.

Jeff Brown, how and if the roadway improvements would be scheduled and coordinated, so as to occur in an orderly fashion? How long will the overall project take to be build?

Jeffrey Dirk, Vanasse & Associates, the goal is to coordinate the roadway improvements with the adjacent property owner, and with the Town Department of Public Works. He noted a section of Arsenal Street from Beachwood to Irving Street would be completely reconstructed.

Dan Lee, Greystar, it would take approximately 14 months until lease-up.

John Hawes, I am concerned about left turns from Beechwood onto Arsenal. Such concerns were raised by the Town's Peer Review firm, WorldTech.

Jeffrey Dirk, Vanasse & Associates, the scheduled post-construction monitoring would look at safety issues as well.

Gideon Schreiber, the Hanover-Cresset project would be monitoring this intersection as well.

Neal Corbett, was the idea of burying utility lines looked at? Was one of the garage elevations screened? Why was one elevation not screened?

Brandon Henry, Greystar, the cost of undergrounding utility lines was cost prohibitive.

Tom Shultz, tat, the proposed screening was living vines. The one side that Mr. Corbett was referring to was where the entrance would be, and as such, it would be hard to grow vines up the facade as it was broken by the garage entrance. Having a difference at the entrance to the garage would help with way finding.

Bob Menton, Beacon Park, I am concerned with the project's traffic impacts that are very underestimated. The proposed project will only exacerbate traffic congestion on the Town's roadways. The Petitioner's Traffic Study does not mesh with that of the abutting property, Hannover-Cresset. The Petitioner needs to address impacts at Beechwood Street. I am concerned about impacts stemming from the shared access drive, particularly on the Beacon Park neighborhood.

Jeffrey Dirk, Vanasse & Associates, the Traffic Study that Mr. Menton is referring to is 4-5 iterations prior to the one being used to gauge the project's impacts. I acknowledge the roadway's functional level now. The planned improvements would add a left turn lane and signals. The physical changes are designed to handle vehicle queues, and to get vehicles making left turns out of the flow.

Gideon Schreiber, the physical improvements between the Petitioner's project and the Hannover-Cresset project would be coordinated. There had been multiple meetings with Town staff and the Petitioner's project team. The residential component of the Hannover-Cresset project does not use the two-lane driveway, only the retail component does.

Joseph Levendusky, Templeton Parkway, I have three questions, is there pedestrian/cyclist permeability of the project? Who would build and maintain the park on the opposite side of Irving Street? Will Arsenal Street be narrowed as a result of the proposed project?

Dan Lee, Greystar, the project did provide significant bicycle and pedestrian permeability. The developer would build and maintain the park, and the right of way along Arsenal Street would not be narrowed as a result of the project. The Petitioner would maintain the park.

Joseph Levendusky, I recommend that the Petitioner join the public transit task force and advocate strongly for MBTA service along the corridor. The MBTA busses along Arsenal Street are already at capacity. The traffic signals along the corridor need to be coordinated, particularly to include technology that would give preference to busses. There needs to be a strong onsite Transportation Demand Management program to get people out of their cars. As for the park at Irving Street, there should be some type of full-time draw there, to bring people to the park. Something like a 4-season atrium or a coffee shop to draw people in.

Roger Erickson, 48 Chester Street, who would maintain the planned park on Irving Street? The Petitioner's landscape architect should meet with the Concerned Citizen's Group to discuss plantings, and how the design could be improved.

Dan Lee, Greystar, Lisa Feltner, Concerned Citizen's Group, said that the proposed development is much improved. She expressed concern about:

1. Bridge Element: Are columns still planned? If so, they seem imposing, and create an industrial look. Ways to create a more open look?
2. Rear of the Building: Create more of a front look. Need for pedestrian scale lighting?
3. Screening to the Residences: Need for more screening abutting the residential neighborhood at the end of Phillips Street.
4. Irving Park: Need to create more of a focal point to make it a success.

Should use Gamble Associates to study the amenities included with the park. Use the Gilkey Turning Shed. Perhaps rehab the structure into adaptive reuse? Create a short and long-term scenario for the park and the Turning Shed. Perhaps convey the structure to Watertown?

The Petitioner should consider on-street parking. Irving/Arsenal is a key node. Also need community space in the project. Perhaps make the first floor garage as adaptable space. Use some of the area for container gardens. Create a food source for the proposed restaurant in the Hannover-Cresset project.

Mark Sideris, Town Council President, I am pleased to see a developer who did not walk away from a project even though the zoning was in flux. The Petitioner had committed to become the test project for the Design Standards & Guidelines. The result is a better project than originally proposed. Brandon Lee is also committed to two more neighborhood meetings on the Irving Street Park.

Barbara Ruskin, Spring Street: this is a much better project. I had the same concerns about long building facades as Chair John Hawes. We need more focus on the design of the bridge between the two buildings. Can the bridge columns be removed, because it's hard for cyclists to navigate them? I hope there will be a community space in the building. I am disappointed that there won't be undergrounding of utilities along Arsenal Street. I hope that there won't be cellular antennas on the roof.

Angie Kounelis, District A Councilor, I commend the developer and residents for working together. At the same time, recent projects in Coolidge Square and in the East End rarely have enough visitors parking. It's important to include enough visitor parking in this project, so it does not spill over into the adjacent neighborhoods.

Jeff Brown, I have missed the last meeting where this project was continued, and I cannot vote on the project.

John Hawes, we encourage the Petitioner to take a look at ways to "lighten up" the curtain wall on the bridge.

Linda Tuttle-Barletta motioned to recommend to the Board of Appeals approval of the Special Permit with Site Plan Review under Sections §9.03, §9.05, §9.07, & §9.08 subject to §5.01.1(k)(2), Mixed Use; §5.04, *Table of Dimensional Regulations*; §5.05(i) FAR; and 5.07(f) based upon the finding that the project meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, subject to conditions set forth in the staff report, with the additional condition that the Petitioner take another look at ways to design the proposed bridge element.

Fergal Brennock seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0. In favor Jeff Brown abstained

80 Elm Street; Cherag Patel, Elm Hospitality LLC – Special Permit with Site Plan Review

Steve Winnick, Attorney, the site is in the East End. The project team consists of the owner Cherag Patel, the architect, site civil engineer and traffic engineer. Gamble Associates vetted the project, and provided a Design Review Report. The proposed project was one of the first submitted under the draft Design Guidelines & Standards. The involvement of the Department of Community Development & Planning (DCDP) staff, and the three year process that had gone into developing the new Design Guidelines & Standards. The Town had historically industrial areas that are in the process of transition. There are various large industrial employers in and around the proposed project site. The site's current and proposed zoning, and the zoning of parcels around it, was shown. The homes that are in the Industrial zone date to the 1920's. These structures are legally pre-existing non-conforming. We suggest that the traffic on Elm Street was already impacted by trucks servicing the adjoining businesses. The Industrial zones are in transition, and this is evidenced by the Greystar project and the Hannover-Cresset project on Arsenal Street. The recent Boston Globe article shows how Watertown is in transition, and more businesses were looking to move to the Town because of favorable per square foot costs relative to surrounding municipalities.

Cherag Patel, I am the site developer. I would like to thank the Planning staff and Town for the opportunity to improve the project. I have developed and owned hotels for some 16 years.

Tom Trykowski, Silverman/ Trykowski Associates, architect, described the proposed building design. We will show views of the street, amended to show the proposed hotel development, to give an idea of what the view from various points would be like if the project were constructed. We will show slides of how the project had evolved from the first concept to the current concept based on input received at the Community Meeting, the follow up neighborhood meeting, and based on DCDP staff and the Gamble Associates review. The proposed final design was oriented to Elm Street.

John Cusack, Bohler Engineering, described the site design and stormwater management. The building has been pushed forward, to sit on Elm Street. The hotel façade on Elm Street was shown, and how vehicles would drive under to access an interior courtyard, and the subsurface parking garage. The trash and recycling dumpsters had been moved, and effectively screened from view by placing them inside the courtyard. The porous pavers are used for surface parking, the landscaping, and stormwater management system. Infiltration of stormwater onsite would accommodate the 100-year storm, and there would be a Low Impact Design rain garden basin near the garage entrance. The site utilities would be underground.

Jim Winn, Ron Mueller Associates, addressed the project's estimated traffic impacts. I will use several PowerPoint slides to highlight issues. The project has been the subject of a Peer Review by WorldTech on behalf of Watertown. An extra vehicle count had been performed at the recommendation of WorldTech. The analysis looked at the AM/PM/Saturday peak hours. The analysis looked at crash histories and safety impacts. These were found to be below MADOT District averages and the vehicle speeds and sight distances were checked. The study's seven year time horizon for the Build Condition. To be conservative, the study assumed a 1% growth in traffic even though trend lines indicate the amount of traffic in the study area is dropping. The Grove Street redevelopment project had been included in the study. Taken together, the data indicate the proposed hotel is a low traffic generator. A table that compared the estimated trip generation from the proposed hotel to three other by-right developments with a lessor footprint, such as a 4,000 square foot coffee shop, was shown. These other projects would create more trips than the proposed hotel use. The Petitioner's mitigation measures, such as construction of pedestrian bump-outs and half the cost of a traffic signal. Several structural roadway changes would have to be implemented with or without the proposed hotel based on the anticipated increase in background traffic because of nearby development.

Neal Corbett, does the Petitioner have a specific operator for the proposed hotel? Will the ground floor uses be open to the public? Has the site been remediated?

Cherag Patel, we cannot yet make public the specific hotel operator, but the hotel could be a variant of Marriott or Hyatt. The ground floor uses, including the lobby/dining area, will be for guests. A limited food service will be available, but also the lobby and the outside terrace area would be open to the public. The site had been cleaned up to MA Department of Environmental Protection standards, but we will remove more soil as part of the project, thereby removing any remaining areas of potential contamination.

Anne Lazarro, I live near the proposed site. The size, scale and height of the proposed hotel are too great for Elm Street. Elm Street is narrow, and already impacted by traffic, it cannot handle more traffic from the proposed hotel. I am concerned with the onsite parking. It may not be enough for guests, etc. If so, the overflow cars will park illegally on adjacent residential streets and surrounding properties. Traffic study is also flawed.

Joseph Levendusky, Templeton Parkway, a hotel is a reasonable use for the site. It would be walking distance to the Watertown Mall. The planned pedestrian improvements and traffic signal is a good idea. The design should go through one more iteration to break up South and North facades.

Barbara Ruskin, Spring Street, the design is much improved. At the same time, I do not see important design features. Public art should be incorporated into the project. The bike racks need to be visible.

Tony Palomba, Councilor, I am in favor of the proposed project. The final proposal is a better design. Inclusion of a solar assessment and post-occupancy traffic study are positives. Adding a vehicle charging station and contribution to TMA positives. The area is in transition: Lumber yard, Target, etc. An additional hotel in Watertown is a benefit because of the room's tax.

Angie Kounelis, District A Councilor, the proposed location is not ideal. The hotel should be on Pleasant or Arsenal Streets. There is only one means of access/egress under building element. What about emergency vehicles? Elm Street can't take more traffic, it's too narrow. Hotel guests won't walk to other areas, so that will create more vehicle trips. I urge the Planning Board to recommend denial of the project.

Resident, the developer should reduce the size of the project so it is more in scale with the neighborhood. I am concerned about impacts to Filippello Park. I am worried that Elm Street will become a cut-through. Hotel is a 24-7 operation, and therefore, it will have more impact on the neighborhood than existing businesses.

Leslie Berell, abutting Door Company owner, the major concern for me and our business is onsite parking. Will a 100+ room hotel have sufficient parking with only 80 spaces? If not, will the guests and visitors park illegally on Wheeler Court, a private way, or on abutting properties?

Elaine Bean, Warren Street, expressed her opposition to the project.

John Hawes, closed the public testimony portion of the hearing.

Linda Tuttle-Barletta, I do not think that the proposed project meets Site Plan Review Criterion #2 under section 9.05(b): *Relation of Buildings to Environment*.

Linda Tuttle-Barletta motioned to recommend to the Board of Appeals approval of the Special Permit with Site Plan Review under §5.01.1(i), Hotel Use, §5.04: *Table of Dimensional Regulations*; §5.05(d): Side Yard Setbacks, and §5.05(i): Floor Area Ratio based upon the finding that the it meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, subject to conditions set forth in the staff report.

Jeff Brown seconded the motion.

VOTE: 3-2 Against

Linda Tuttle-Barletta, Jeff Brown, Neal Corbett - against

Neal Corbett motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:00 PM.

Fergal Brennock seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In Favor.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 11:00 PM MINUTES APPROVED: _____

For more detailed Minutes see the DVD dated 5/21/15 which is available in the DCDP office.