

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: March 31, 2015 PLACE: Town Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:15 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Special Meeting/Public Hearing

PRESENT: Jeff Brown, Acting Chair; Linda Tuttle-Barletta; Neal Corbett; Fergal Brennock
Steve Magoon, Director; Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber,
Senior Planner; Andrea Adams, Senior Planner

Steve Magoon, Director, the purpose of this hearing is to discuss potential zoning text amendments to implement draft Design Standards and Guidelines. Excellent job was done by David Gamble and Brian Gregory of Gamble Associates drafted the proposed Design Standards and Guideline. This will bring development to the next level. The developers of Greystar project participated in the process, and allowed it to be a test case project. The project overall represents a significant moment for the Town, taking development review to the next level. These Standards and Guidelines takes a look at the development within the box of zoning, and how it relates to adjoining properties, other community interest aspects. It represents a significant advancement in Watertown's development review process. The Design Guidelines are largely aspirational, make sense, and are appropriate for the community, these are not always applicable to every project. The Guidelines have some flexibility in how they are applied and overall process with also involve a design professional, who the Town intends at least in the near term to be Gamble Associates. There is a level of expertise in this firm. Design Standards are zoning text amendments that all projects will have to comply with. The hearing tonight is primarily focused on the zoning text amendments for the proposed Design Standards. There will have to be a public hearing before Town Council.

David Gamble, Gamble Associates, I am an architect and urban planner. Brian Gregory and I worked on the project. It was a pleasure to work on the project, and through a show of hands, most of the audience had attended at least one of three public meetings on the Design Standards and Guidelines. It was very rewarding to have so many people involved in the process. The Standards and Guidelines are a direct outgrowth of the Comprehensive Plan. Draft poster has been created and an 80 page Design Guidelines booklet, as well as 20 pages of Design Standards. There is a challenge of negotiation, both parties want something from the other. Inherent conflicts are in development projects. Developers want a reasonable return on investment, clear approval process. The Town wants vibrant spaces, jobs, connectivity. Abutters have specific concerns about noise, shadows, height. The Town wants integration with broader goals, too. Hopefully the Standards and Guidelines provide a way to evaluate decisions.

Steve Magoon, Director, the decision was made to peruse Design Standards and Guidelines focused on large scale commercial projects. There is a concern about design in smaller, one and two-family projects. That may be something the Planning Department may pursue in the future.

David Gamble, many comments were received in the three public meetings: Focus on design quality; look at the integration and relationship of projects to each other; look at commercial corridors and mixed-use. Uses change, but buildings endure. The form, character, and relationship to the public way were what you need to get right. Connectivity and connection to the natural character. People want places, and not every street needs to be designed as a major thoroughfare. The interface between the building and the major street is the challenge. The Elan/Greystar project was used as an example, it was very helpful to have a "test case." Design has come a long way. Parking has changed to retail space. A gap was created that allows pedestrian connectivity through the site. Street and open space created. Unit count remains in place, but it is a substantially better project. Done everything the Design Guidelines have asked them to. More connectivity between and through the site was provided. There are concerns about building length. A graphic of various facades of buildings in Watertown with their respective lengths was created. A longer façade is not necessarily a bad thing. A graphic of the

Watertown Square on Main Street was shown. It's a long façade, but it has 24 entrances. Quality is the key, and the number of entrances into the façade is important considerations.

Signage: there are instances where large developments benefit from having larger signs. There are cases where neon signs can be desirable, using a photograph of the Watertown Diner.

Building height: it depends on the site, the context and topography. The Design Standards seek to clarify this by using another measurement technique. A picture of our offices in Central Square was shown, a building is adjacent to the 10-story building where our office is located, is a one or two story office. At the same time, what's important about this example is the street level experience of pedestrians.

Transparency is key, but perhaps more important than building length. An example of 311 Arsenal Street, a building with a 1,000-foot long façade. At the same time, the façade has significant transparency with large windows. Is this façade bad? The "sweet spot" for façade length is something about 150 feet long, with good transparency and ground-floor retail. A study of other building types in Watertown was done. The Guidelines and Standards are crafted for Watertown. Building setbacks have a substantial impact on how a building form is perceived.

The decision was to feather the Guidelines into the Zoning Ordinance. Brief overview of the Guidelines showing various examples of representative model drawings. They try to show views from ground level. These are aspirations. The Standards are requirements. The Guidelines should be used as a reference point for developers.

We have sought to underscore the primary issue in each Standard. On Building Height, the decision not to use average height was driven in part by sites with sloping topography. The proposed definition addresses topography and slope.

Facilitation of groundwater recharging: a strong contingent that wants sustainable development. Landscaping using native, drought-tolerant vegetation.

With regard to the proposed exceptions to height regulations, a way to address density on the site is by building taller. More space on the site can also be devoted to public space and groundwater recharging. If there is a concern about monotony along certain corridors in Town, regulating the buildings and making them all the same height is only going to exacerbate this concern. Some variation is often helpful. Therefore, there should be some exceptions to height limits. The 4 proposed exceptions to the proposed building height limits.

Building setbacks included bay windows, porches, to avoid flat architecture. Use balconies, terraces. Articulate more variation in elevation.

Exceptions to setback requirements: these provide a way to provide outdoor areas, for dining, public art, but not intended for automobile use.

A new text dealing with exterior materials has been added. We seek to limit the use of vinyl, EFIS, etc. "Sustainable" in this context means real, not synthetic, durable, and better weather resistant. Also, if you prohibit something, you need to show what can be used instead.

The requirement for 50% transparency on the ground floors. This number was arrived at looking closely at Watertown's commercial corridors. We want to see into spaces. Entrances must be placed 50 feet apart, it is a good number for commercial corridors.

Notes to the Table of Regulations: there is a 50/50/50 rule. 50% transparent, 50 feet apart for entrances, and 50% of ground floor commercial space. There are other notes relating to façade length.

150 feet long for the maximum dimension without variation, allowance for setbacks. Elan project meets these criteria with setbacks and courtyards. We have arrived at these dimensions because they are appropriate for urban design. Walking or driving along the corridor, will perceive it differently. Building itself can be no more than 400 feet. We acknowledged that this is a point of debate. There is language for measuring setbacks with slope and a one to one ratio.

Minimum building height: the Design Standards require no building shall be less than 24 feet or a minimum of two stories. Developers aren't keen on this. This is a way for Watertown to preserve open space and residential character through density and building upwards.

The draft language on the goals of the Design Guidelines, they are so much more than Watertown had before. It is a result of public meetings and the Comprehensive Plan.

Draft language on automotive and bicycle parking requirements. We are proposing to lower some of the requirements for parking, not everyone has a car. As more people live along the corridors, there may be a stronger push for transit. People want to live along the bicycle path. We encourage shared parking, mixed use projects can naturally share parking. Residents leave during the day, and spaces can then be used by the commercial space. New language on car sharing has been added. Non-conforming uses and off-street parking relative to 1988. Chosen because one of the most recent zoning ordinance changes. Discussed what constitutes "a change." Based on an example in Watertown. The landscaping requirements for surface lots are included. We have address storm water management and vegetated buffers.

Important components of building massing and the public realm is included. Sign types vary by store type and size. We have defined terms more to provide clarity, allowing one sign per occupant. Character and quality of signage is important. Banner signs can be used appropriately on older mill buildings, it depends on the type of building. Signage calibrates with architecture and clarifies the area of entrance signs. Aggregate square footage of signage on buildings derived from Watertown examples.

New language on exterior lighting is proposed, night lighting is critical. Lighting is important component of design.

Design Guidelines and Standards are only as affective as their enforcement. Projects are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. It is important to have an outside reviewer. We need another eye on the work to ensure the Standards are met, and the intent of the Guidelines is met. New language has been added. Development above a certain square footage – 10,000 square feet an appropriate measure. This is going to raise the design quality in Watertown. The fee will be paid for by the developers. \$10,000 seems to be an appropriate number. Peer reviews will be done for traffic and design.

The issue of *LEED Certified* versus *LEED Certifiable* is discussed. *LEED Certifiable* is more than Watertown has now. It does not mean LEED is recognized. The LEED commissioning process is time-consuming and costly.

Jeff Brown, the Planning Board had received several large comment letters just prior to the public hearing. As such, we propose that the Board and staff attempt to analyze where the major issues are, and based on this, the hearing should be continued. The prior work sessions on the Design Guidelines and Standards had been well attended.

Steve Magoon, the Board should hear public testimony. Comments about the process are appreciated, the staff would do their best to address the Board's directions.

Jeff Brown, the audience members cover the major issues in their comments, as the Board had received several detailed comment letters. The commenters should try to refrain from arguing points.

Neal Corbett, the audience members should summarize the major points, and try to refrain from repeating comments if they had already been made by a prior speaker.

Steve Magoon, the speakers take their turns, and the staff and Mr. Gamble would be able to follow along as they made their comments.

Libby Shaw, Trees for Watertown, I commend the effort, but suggest that the number of trees be increased. I strongly urge the Board to ensure that larger tree grates and other measures be taken to guarantee the health of the Town's green infrastructure. There are certain trees that should be mentioned, reviewed and preserved as a result of historic preservation reviews and concerns.

David Peckar, Wells Ave, I commend Gamble and Associates for the draft Design Guidelines and Standards. Using Gamble and Associates is a great start. It would be better to have several firms that may have different design philosophies. As projects come up, they should be given to different firms. This will also allow for an appeals process. Perhaps a controversial project goes to all three firms by petition.

Steve Corbett, Town Councilor, the definition of Building Height in the Standards is too complex. It cannot be easily interpreted, it should not be that complex.

Jeff Brown, perhaps a diagram in the zoning text would help explain the Building Height.

Bill McQuillan, Boylston Properties, we commend Gamble and Associates and the Planning staff for their work. We are strong proponents of Design Standards, better standards make for better projects overall. At the same time, scope and size of Boylston Properties and their aspirations make the proposed changes inadequate to transform the Arsenal Project into a vibrant community center. Could include less of an enclosed mall, residential units on the property, and connections to the Charles River, several new restaurants, perhaps a movie theatre, and perhaps a taller building. This is a gateway to Watertown. Initial conversations with Town staff as well as the Comprehensive Plan indicate that they want much of what he just mentioned. The draft changes are thoughtful, appropriate for smaller scale properties, and other Town areas such as the squares, but they don't really address what is needed for a regional site and one that needs a major transformation. I had some discussions with the Planning staff and David Gamble about how to augment the proposed draft. I am a great supporter of the proposed draft language, other than it does not really apply to Boylston Properties. We hope to come forward soon with transformational plans for the Arsenal Project. We have submitted a letter with proposed additional language. We are working with Michael Wang on additional language to address the needs of the Boylston Properties.

Stephane Acel-Green, Co-Chair, Watertown Energy, Efficiency and Environment Committee, we applaud the design process and are thrilled with new Guidelines and Standards. We look forward to the Comprehensive Plan's completion. The Planning Board should consider *LEED Certification* versus *LEED Certifiable* at least for certain projects. Perhaps there is a building style, size or complexity that warrants being LEED Certified.

Joe Levendusky, Templeton Pkwy, in general I support the proposed Design Standards and Guidelines. I endorse the comments of Ms. Fletner and the Concerned Citizens Group. I suggest that there was an also important consideration missing, such as overlay districts for different areas of Watertown, such as the Watertown Mall, Coolidge Square, etc. I endorse the idea of an Arts District.

Susan Falkoff, Councilor, what happens if buildings begin to “creep upwards?” One of the proposed allowances for additional height is to conform to the height of already existing surrounding buildings. Won't this cause a race to build taller and taller structures?

Christian Regnier, Goulston & Storrs, we have provided detailed written comments on the proposed Design Standards and Guidelines. The proposed language in the draft Standards with regards to the location of bike/community paths and bus stops in project frontage would better be in the Design Guidelines rather than the Standards.

Elaine Bean, Warren Street, I object to the proposed standards for Building Height. I suggest that the proposed language would result in massive buildings, the proposed language was too accommodating to developers.

David Martin, 229 North Beacon Street, a required minimum height could result in horizontal sprawl. It also might prevent the creation of smaller buildings.

Elodia Thomas, 67 Marion Road, the proposed Standards did not address residential development. More control is needed over proposed building changes such as dormers and other features. I recommend that the Planning Board look to recent draft zoning amendments in Somerville, around the Union Market area.

Lisa Feltner, 34 Parker Street, Concerned Citizens Group, the Group had submitted comments on the proposed Design Standards and Guidelines. A compendium of comments received was on the Town's website.

Steve Corbett, Town Councilor, I question the applicability of the exceptions to building setbacks. Should these apply in all areas of Watertown? If they were applied uniformly, you could not construct a bulkhead within a 4 foot side yard in a residential area. It's not easy to screen chimneys, antennas and solar arrays in residential areas, so this requirement should not be applicable to Watertown's residential areas. With regard to permeable pavers, it is now required. Permeable pavers are not needed given the other requirements for subsurface drainage. On exterior lighting, the proposed new requirements should only apply in commercial areas. The proposed new section on fees for design review needed more specificity. Should the Design Standards apply to all projects of 4+ residential units or 10,000 square feet? Is this the right numbers? Is there a data on the kinds of projects that the new requirements would apply to using these threshold numbers? I suggest that LEED Certified may be acceptable for larger projects, but not for smaller ones.

Brian Hebeisen, Watertown Energy, I am impressed with the draft Design Standards. At the same time, the changes in the energy and efficiency fields are unprecedented from 10 years ago. LEED and Net-zero buildings are no longer strange concepts. As such, I urge the Planning Board to be more forward-thinking in the Design Guidelines and Standards with regard to energy issues. Energy efficiency ultimately pays for itself. The draft language concerning solar assessments is great, but there should be requirements to make it standard on projects. I urge the Planning Board to consider solar accessibility in the design of buildings and that there be a process in the Guidelines and Standards for broadening, changing and updating them.

Aaron Dushku, Town Councilor, the Planning Board should consider allowing more height to allow more density. The proposed 400 foot length of building walls was too great, and should be scaled back. I acknowledge that variation can make it “appear” a façade is shorter or smaller, but this is not enough. I urge the Planning Board to consider more pass-throughs to break up facades and create more pedestrian and vehicular connections. The Design Standards should consider the desire to promote more restaurants in Watertown by adjusting the parking requirements accordingly. Particularly, reduced parking requirements for smaller restaurants. Cambridge has Transportation Demand Management Ordinance, and this could be a model for “unbundling” parking, which is when owner or renter pays less if the unit has reduced or no parking. The Design Standards should include adaptive reuse concepts for parking structures. The shared parking should be strongly encouraged, developers could pay into a fund to create parking if they are unable to construct adequate parking for their project.

Barbara Ruskin, Spring Street, the process to develop the draft Design Standards and Guidelines was excellent. The new requirements need to pay attention to all the Town’s zoning districts. Mitigation should be required to lessen a project’s impacts. I support the comment letter from CCG. I propose that Arts District be created. Public passages are needed between all projects, and especially to the Charles River. The height should be sacrificed for these public passages. The frontages of buildings should be shortened and allow for larger structures behind. Antennas should not necessarily be screened, so that people know where they are. Would art installations using lights be subject to the proposed new exterior lighting standards. We could take some of the details from the Pleasant Street Corridor District and include it in the Design Standards. More public input is needed in the design process. I urged the Planning Board to consider multiple meetings and time for the public to digest and comment on project designs, the design meetings should be structured around each category of the Design Guidelines.

David Leon, I am in support of including Universal Design in the Design Standards and Guidelines. I urge the Planning Board to adopt John Hawes’ comments.

David Ferris, I comment on Section 5 concerning transparency in design. These requirements should not necessarily apply to parking garages. The Planning Board should consider special requirements for Main Street. Pleasant Street and Arsenal Street need to be treated differently. I urge the Planning Board to adopt special standards for the Charles River.

Joan Gumbleton, Waltham Street, the buildings on Pleasant Street are going up fast. This means that the interior quality of the buildings is not what it should be. Could this be addressed, either through the Design Guidelines and Standards, or other means?

Marilyn Devaney, I voted against creation of the Pleasant Street Corridor District in 2007. The development on Pleasant Street is blocking views of the Charles River for surrounding residential areas. Specific standards are needed for the other zoning districts.

Jeff Brown, closed the public portion of the hearing.

Steve Magoon, the Planning staff is looking to the Planning Board for comments and direction on next steps.

Jeff Brown, the height of buildings seems to be an issue. I strongly recommend a diagram be included in the Design Standards to illustrate the way to calculate Building Height.

Neal Corbett, how are the Design Standards and Guidelines going to address the Town's different zoning districts?

Fergal Brennock, I suggest that we carefully look at number of stories as a surrogate for building height. I recommend excluding single and two-family residences from the proposed exterior lighting standards. In the residential zones, make the Design Standards and Guidelines apply to five (5) or more residential units. I recommend the Design Standards and Guidelines use "*LEED Certifiable*."

Steve Magoon, the Planning staff will take into account the public comments and testimony, and would provide an annotated version of the Design Standards with the Planning staff's and Mr. Gamble's recommendations.

Linda Tuttle-Barletta moved to continue the hearing to the April 8, 2015 Planning Board meeting.
Neal Corbett seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In Favor.

Jeff Brown adjourned the meeting at 9:40 PM