

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: June 8, 2015 PLACE: Town Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Regular Monthly Meeting

PRESENT: John Hawes, Chairman; Jeff Brown; Linda Tuttle-Barletta; Neal Corbett
Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Planning Board; Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner;
Andrea Adams, Senior Planner

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Linda Tuttle-Barletta motioned to approve Minutes of 3/31/15, 4/30/15 and 5/13/15 meetings.
Jeff Brown seconded the motion. Voted: 4-0 In Favor

PENDING CASES

- **600 Pleasant Street;** Estepan Antgeryassian, Cabinets Plus – Special Permit

Estepan Antgeryassian, I would like to rent the space in question for my cabinet business. I have lived in Watertown as a business for over 22 years. The building in which my business is now, was sold. I am a single-person operation, but sometimes I employ a single helper. My company makes custom cabinetry, all the work is done inside.

Andrea Adams, the Special Permit is to renovate and occupy 2,161 square feet of tenant space in an existing office/industrial building. Of the tenant space, 1,088 square feet will be used for fabrication/assembly of cabinets. The remaining 1,073 square feet will be used for an office and storage. Six onsite parking spaces will be provided. Conditions from two prior approvals, one in March 2003 and one in April 2013, remain unimplemented. As such, staff recommends the current project be conditioned to require implementation of the 2003 and 2013 conditions no later than 90 calendar days after the date of Board's decision approving the project. The proposed retrofit is consistent or conditionally consistent with the Criteria of Approval in the Zoning Ordinance. The previously recommended conditions are related to installation of required bicycle racks and landscaping. The Department of Public Works staff and Tree Warden are available to work with the Property Owner to implement the landscaping.

Linda-Tuttle Barletta motioned that the Planning Board grant conditional approval of the requested Special Permit in accordance with Section 5.015(a)(1), as it meets the criteria set forth under §9.05(b), and satisfies the general purpose of the Zoning Ordinance as outlined in §1.00.

Jeff Brown seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In favor

Andrea Adams left at this time.

- **480-3 Arsenal Street;** William McQuillen, Manager, 480 Arsenal Group LLC – Special Permit with Site Plan Review

John Hawes, this project was continued from June 10 Planning Board meeting to allow the petitioner additional time to answer concerns of the Board and residents. Some of the issues to be discussed at this meeting would be traffic and the site circulation as it relates to Nichols Avenue. The Board had received a petition from a group of residents from 40 Bigelow Ave condominium.

William McQuillan, a letter of support from the nearby St.James School is submitted tonight. Alternatives of placement of the parking deck on the site will be shown by the architect.

John Sullivan, Architect, there are three options of the parking deck location. Each presents some challenge. We feel that the garage is located in the right spot. It will provide visual relief and appropriate square footage needed.

Jeff Heidelberg, Boylston Properties, the location of the gate works well with the site plan. It provides connection to Coolidge Square, which is an important attractive place for our tenants. All retailers in the area will benefit. It is important to create a connection as stated in the Comprehensive Plan. We have come to agreements with St. James School, making the area safe for students. The speed bump will be relocated, traffic will move away from the school. We have met with DPW to discuss relocation of signage. Pedestrian bump out/crosswalk will be created.

Giles Ham, Vanasse & Associates, we have counted the number of cars that will be exiting the site at Nichols Ave. Having the gate on this side makes sense, it will be very safe.

Jeff Brown, I do not understand this garage, the deck will have space for 85 cars, and fewer cars will be on the first floor because of the grade.

John Sullivan, the full height of the garage is facing the office building. The ramp will be a precast concrete. It will not be as visible from Nichols.

Gideon Schreiber, we are working with DPW. Additional plans have been provided, showing public amenities.

Neal Corbett. How will the gate operate? If the bulk of traffic is coming from Arsenal Street, will the cars cut through to access the garage? Will the Nichols gate be monitored? Residents are concerned that more traffic will be coming from Mt. Auburn Street through the residential neighborhoods.

William McQuillan, we will not close the Nichols Avenue gate. Bigelow Ave gets 5 cars per minute now, with the project it will be 6. This will be a first class project with first class gate. If there is a problem, timing changes will be made. Tenants will sign leases with 2 entrances, we will not be able to close the gate.

Gideon Schreiber, peer review was conducted by DPW and consultant, the gate will be appropriate. If they miscalculated within 10%, they will be responsible and off site changes will be done. Monitoring is a safety measure. The neighborhood improvements will discourage speeding and make it a safer environment.

John Hawes, we do not know what will happen. The key is how to deal with all the traffic. The neighborhood needs to be protected. It is important to discourage people from exiting onto Nichols Ave.

William McQuaillan, we will encourage the tenants to walk to the merchants in Coolidge Square. These are narrow streets, there will be no left turn exiting the site on Nichols Ave.

Dianne Devlin, 64 Bigelow, Avenue, we welcome the project but are opposed to the gate being used because that will create a road. The "No Left Turn" signs will drive more traffic up Bigelow, which is already congested. Getting people to Coolidge Square is a good idea, but there are no places to park. Even when Hood Rubber used the site, that "gate" was not open for traffic.

Adam DeGiovani, representative of New England Regional Council of Carpenters, has a General Contractor been selected to do the work? Callahan Incorporated seem to be a preferred source on the project.

William McQuillan, general contractor had not yet been selected. We have spoken to a number of contractors.

George O'Martian, Bigelow Ave, will the other companies on the site, such as AT&T, NESN, etc. have access to this site through the Nichols Ave gate? It's very hard to walk on Bigelow Avenue; because of the tree roots have lifted the sidewalk. There is very little parking in the area.

William McQuillan, our company does not own those other properties. We will not prevent people from accessing the parking lot at 480-3.

John Hawes, is the gate in question at 480-3 similar to the one on the Doble Engineering property? Is it key-card activated? How is it operated?

Megan O'Halloran, Executive Director of the Watertown-Belmont Chamber of Commerce, local businesses in Coolidge Square will be positively affected by the new "gate" or link to Nichols and Bigelow Avenue. Employees at 480-3 site will have access to the Square. Chamber wants local businesses to thrive. Opening the "gate" does this.

Gideon Schreiber, the initial proposal did not have a gate. Staff asked that a gate be put into the project plan. There are pros and cons to having access into the site. This is the first real discussion of how the "gate" would operate.

John Hawes, if it's open, it will just become a speed bump. If it has key card access, then it does something to influence traffic flows.

Steve Corbett, Vice Chair, Town Council, 14 Irving Park, I am in support of the project. This is the type of redevelopment Watertown needs, and the type of tenants that will be beneficial to the Town. It is important to have connections, and not "wall off" properties, the gate on Nichols Ave will provide that. I understand issues of congestion and traffic but I believe this will help disperse traffic around the area.

John Hawes, this is a great opportunity to create new streets and circulation patterns. If so, why bother with a gate, if it just moves up and down as cars approach?

William McQuillan, the situation at 480-3 Arsenal is not similar to the example at VHB. Gate will discourage cut through. Nichols Avenue is approximately 5 feet above the grade of the project site's parking lot. That difference in grade would also discourage cars trying to speed through the parking lot. I suggest that the route between Arsenal Street and Nichols would be very circuitous.

Mary Keenan, Bigelow Avenue, someone was doing survey work and taking pictures of traffic around 8 am. Is this connected to this project? I do not use Nichols Avenue late in the afternoon. When I did recently, there were 20 vehicles coming from Arlington Street, before I could make a left turn onto Bigelow.

Tony Palomba, Councilor, 40 Oakley Road, I strongly support the project. This is the kind of project Watertown needs. It will redevelop a property into something that will attract good tenants and add to quality of business in Town and to the tax base. I recognize the increased that the traffic may be an

issue. Will there be a post-occupancy traffic impact survey? If such a post-occupancy assessment could be included, any potential impacts could be addressed.

Gideon Schreiber, yes, the staff report includes a recommendation for a post-occupancy traffic monitoring program.

John Hawes, Chair, the question would be post-occupancy what could the Petitioner do to alleviate any unforeseen traffic?

Don Levey, Owner, Deluxe Town Diner, I welcome the project, this is exactly what Watertown and Coolidge Square need. I have been before the Board for an expansion 15 years ago. I welcome the traffic, in that it will not be transitory for short periods such as the upcoming CVS. Entrance should be more prominent on the North side. Town voted down a project on Grove Street. Instead, got a parking lot for Mt. Auburn Hospital, without any gain. The hospital workers who park in that lot do not tend to shop in the neighborhood. The current project, however, would generate employees who would shop in the area.

John Hawes, the owner of the site referred to by Mr. Levey was actually Mount Auburn Cemetery. He suggested it might be used for another purpose in the future.

Angeline Kounelis, District A Councilor, 55 Keenan Street, this is a wonderful project and I welcome it to the community, and hopes that the Board will look favorably on it. It will bring vibrancy to the community, but Nichols Avenue gate should not be opened. The gate, if there was one, was for employees of Hood Rubber to walk the entire site. I would support a pedestrian gate and drop-off buses or shuttle buses or bicycles. As currently configured, employees of NESN and AT&T can use the gate as well. This is a quoted from a Memorandum from Matthew Shuman, Town Engineer, stating "serious concerns about an additional access point off of Nichols Avenue." The Memo questions whether adequate mitigation can be provided to address impacts to residential neighborhoods. I suggest that the Petitioner's proposed structural roadway changes won't do anything for the traffic generation and reducing congestion. Opening the access for vehicles is a selling point for the developer. Opening the gate instead for pedestrians would be a benefit for the community and Coolidge Square. I commend the developer for the project overall, but the Nichols Avenue gate is a sticking point. The figures from the Traffic Study illustrate the magnitude of the traffic generated by the project. 45% of the traffic is projected to be from Nichols Avenue. Congestion is an issue for residents on all of the surrounding streets and that enter into the Square. Queues at surrounding streets are already quite long. Parking is at a premium at Coolidge Square. Therefore, I encourage pedestrian connections are a better option. This is not the only development that will be coming forward in this area, adding traffic into the road network. This project does not currently have vehicle access on Nichols Avenue.

James Cebel, Board of Trustees of St. Stephen's School, the concerns of the school have been substantially addressed. There are ongoing discussions that are also going on to further resolve remaining issues.

William McQuillan, we will not have a gate at the Southwest entrance to the property. NESN could access the property and the gate at Nichols Avenue. We are not going to prevent those people from coming through the property.

Gideon Schreiber, post occupancy study will catch whether or not the gate will be helping with the traffic flow. The post occupancy study will be counting traffic/cars that are not necessarily coming from just the 480-3 site.

Arleen McCarthy, the gate is discussed as something to contain traffic. There could be a compromise and it could be a fixed gate. We can figure out the traffic pattern, and then leave the gate up or down as the post occupancy monitoring warrants?

John Hawes, an automated gate would potentially discourage drive-through. This is the fifth project in 4 months that is impacting the East End. I would want a condition about the use of Nichols from the East as the exit and entrance.

Steve Corbett, would the Petitioner consider putting in a key-card activated gate at both ends at some time in the future?

William McQuillan, other tenants have total control over their employees and their tenants. The businesses at 480-3 will have multiple tenants, employees, and visitors. We can do traffic calming inside the site which will help discourage cut through. I can't accept a key card activated gate, because it's a multi-tenant building.

John Hawes, the concern over which buildings have access to the site post project is valid. The point is that 480-3 is currently a dead-end. It cannot be accessible from the surrounding buildings onto Nichols Avenue. Traffic study represents that 480-3 is a project onto itself. Other buildings exit towards Arsenal or down Dexter. Is the Town concerned that the traffic study takes the 480-3 building onto itself, alone, in terms of trip generation?

William McQuillan, the AT&T building has very few employees. NESN building can't get onto Nichols Avenue right now.

Gideon Schreiber, traffic monitoring will be using real time vehicle counts. The monitoring will determine if there is more impact than anticipated. We can also put internal speed controls inside the parking lot, if necessary. Threshold level for more work to calm/control impacts is relatively low, a 10% change.

Neal Corbett, I am comforted by the post occupancy traffic impact analysis. Add "on site" to Condition #10 to address potential for internal speed controls.

Linda Tuttle-Barletta motioned to recommend approval of the Special Permit/Site Plan Review under Sections 5.01.3(a)(2) and 5.01.5(c)(2) based upon the finding that it meets the criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance subject to conditions set forth in the staff report and to amend condition #10 to include traffic mitigation.

Jeff Brown seconded the motion.

VOTE: 3-1 Linda Tuttle-Barletta opposed