

**City of Schenectady
Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
June 17, 2020**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Wallinger called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Due to the closure of City Hall because of the Covid-19 Virus, the meeting was conducted online via WebEx.

II. ATTENDANCE

PRESENT: Mary Moore Wallinger, Chair; Bradley Lewis, Vice Chair; Ryan Bailey; Randall Beach; Andrew Healey; Jason Bogdanowicz-Wilson; Matthew Smith, Senior Planner; Andrew Koldin, Corporation Counsel
EXCUSED: Richard Ferro

III. CONFLICT OF INTEREST CHECK

None.

IV. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Lewis, seconded by Commissioner Bailey, to approve the Minutes of the May 13, 2020 meeting as submitted.

Motion carried unanimously.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. YWCA OF NORTHEASTERN NY requests site plan approval and Special Use Permit review pursuant to Section 264-90 B and F and Schedule A of a proposal to construct a new building with 54 supportive housing units at 38-40 Washington Avenue, tax parcel # 39.62-1-10 & 11, located in an “RH-2” Stockade Historic Residential District.

Andrew Brick, attorney for the applicants, Kim Siciliano, Executive Director of the YWCA, Terri Belkas-Mitchell of Xenolith Partners, John Montagne, landscape architect, and Brian Loughlin, architect, presented the proposal.

Ms. Siciliano began the presentation by giving a brief history of the YWCA and the services that they offer. She stated that she began her role as Executive Director in 2016 and since that time the number of clients seeking the YWCA’s services has increased dramatically. She explained how this new addition to the campus will allow them to serve more clients in a more efficient and effective manner. Ms. Siciliano noted

that the main entrance to the building will be moved from the front façade, reducing the congestion on the street and providing more privacy for clients. She also noted that as is currently the case there will be staff on duty 24 hours a day.

Ms. Belkas-Mitchell introduced herself and explained that her firm is a women-owned affordable housing development company. She gave a brief overview of the goals and details of the design of the project, explaining that the new housing units will not be dormitory style, as the existing units are, so the units will have separate bathroom and kitchen facilities, giving the clients a greater sense of privacy and autonomy.

John Montagne, Vice President and Head of Land Development at Greenman-Pedersen Inc, next reviewed the site plan. He noted that while the YWCA had originally sought to add 75 housing units the project was scaled back after discussions with the neighbors and the Stockade Neighborhood Association. He explained that they will be adding parking as well as improving the existing parking by adding landscaped islands and shade trees. Mr. Montagne stated that green space on the site will be increased with the new addition and the impervious surface on the site will increase from 54% to 62%, still within the allowed 80%.

Brian Loughlin, Director of Planning and Urban Design for Magnusson Architecture and Planning, reviewed the revised elevation drawings that had recently been submitted. He explained that the goal was to make the new building fit in with the context of the original YWCA building, while not trying to look historic or like it was not clearly a much later addition. He stated that the placement of the addition on the site was heavily influenced by the floodplain and the existing archeologically significant areas of the site.

Commissioner Wallinger commented that she appreciates the thoughtfulness and consideration that went into the design. She asked if they had considered adding windows to the blank front gables, which were shown as simple brick facades on the plans, or perhaps some design in the brickwork. Mr. Loughlin stated that they had considered both options, but the consensus had been that the windows in the gables looked very busy. He added that the design team would not be averse to providing alternate drawings of both options so that they could work with the Commission to come up with a mutually agreeable final design. Commissioner Wilson agreed with Commissioner Wallinger, stating that in his opinion either some additional brickwork or windows would enhance this portion of the design. He added that overall, he is very happy with the design and believes that it fits the site very well. The other Commissioners indicated that they agreed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Robin White, resident of the Stockade and owner of multiple properties in the neighborhood, submitted an email in support of the project.

Frank Gilmore, Stockade resident and architect, spoke in favor of the proposal. He stated that he agreed that the design team had been very thoughtful in their approach and considerate of the surrounding historic neighborhood.

James Addison, resident of 30 Washington Avenue, which is directly adjacent to the YWCA, expressed his support for the proposal. He asked if the project would have any effect on the nearby waterfront. *Mr. Montagne responded that the City will still have an easement for sewer access in the area, but the YWCA will continue to maintain the entire area that they own.*

Greg Sauer, resident of 19 Washington Avenue, stated that while he supports the work of the YWCA and believes that this is a worthwhile project, he and his wife have serious concerns about pedestrian and traffic safety on the already busy street. He added that often there are very large trucks making deliveries to the YWCA and they stop on the street while unloading, impeding visibility and traffic flow. *Mr. Brick responded that as part of the new site design there will be space for most trucks to be able to pull in off the street to unload. Ms. Siciliano stated that they ask their vendors to only bring smaller trucks to the site, and all but one, a food wholesaler who delivers to many other food service establishments in the area, has done so. She added that this supplier only delivers once a week and the driver is aware that he cannot leave his truck stopped in the street for any length of time, so he always tries to be very speedy with his deliveries. Commissioner Wallinger stated that because that area has such heavy pedestrian traffic, she believes that the City should put crosswalks at the nearby intersections if they aren't there already. Staff will follow up.*

Suzanne Unger, President of the Stockade Neighborhood Association, spoke in favor of the proposal. She stated that the YWCA and their design team has been very open to working with the neighborhood and the Association believes that this project will have a positive impact on the City as a whole.

Seeing no further members of the public who wished to speak Commissioner Wallinger closed the public hearing.

Mr. Loughlin commented that the closing of the alleyway at the edge of the campus to vehicle traffic will also help to regulate traffic around the site.

SEQR RESOLUTION

Motion by Commissioner Lewis, seconded by Commissioner Beach, to accept the Negative Declaration.

Motion carried unanimously.

SPECIAL USE PERMIT

Motion by Commissioner Lewis, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, to approve the Special Use Permit with the following findings of fact:

1. The proposed use **will not** substantially impact upon the nature and character of the surrounding neighborhood.
2. The proposed use **will not** have a substantial or undue adverse effect upon adjacent property, the character of the neighborhood, traffic conditions, parking, utility facilities, and other matters affecting public health, safety, and general welfare.
3. Operations in connection with the proposed use **will not** be more objectionable to nearby properties by reason of noise, fumes, vibration, or flashing lights because the proposal does not include these nuisances.
4. The proposed use **will be** served adequately by essential public facilities and services, as it does not require or impact highways, streets, parking spaces, police and fire protection, drainage structures, refuse disposal, water and sewer, and schools.
5. The proposed use **will not** result in the destruction, loss, or damage of any natural, scenic, architectural, or historic feature of significant importance.
6. The proposed use **complies** with all additional requirements imposed on it by the provisions of this chapter and no variances are required.

Motion carried unanimously.

SITE PLAN APPROVAL

Motion by Commissioner Bailey, seconded by Commissioner Healey, to accept the proposal with the following conditions:

1. The address will be prominently displayed so that it is easily visible from Washington Avenue.
2. Metal roll gates and iron bars are not permitted on any doors or windows at any time in the future.
3. The applicant will submit a revised site plan and elevation drawings, showing the final design discussed at the meeting, to City Planning staff for final review and approval.
4. If during the course of construction changes become necessary, the applicant will return to City Planning staff for review and to the full Planning Commission for further consideration should the changes be deemed significant.

Motion carried unanimously.

B. REDBURN DEVELOPMENT requests site plan approval pursuant to Section 264-90 F of a proposal to develop the site at 501 State Street, tax parcel # 39.72-4-14, located in a “C-4” Downtown Commercial District.

Damien Pinto-Martin, Vice President of Development for Redburn Development, presented the proposal.

Mr. Pinto-Martin briefly reviewed the site plan and explained that the Commission had approved the demolition of the building and the installation of a temporary parking lot in the fall of 2019, but Redburn had decided to skip the parking lot and go directly into the development of the new building. He reviewed the building design, pointing out that the first floor will have retail tenants and the upper two floors will be a mix of one and two-bedroom, market rate apartments. He noted that the building will have many amenities, including a fitness center and the concierge trash service that Redburn typically offers in its apartment buildings. Mr. Pinto-Martin explained that the materials and colors of the building exterior have not yet been finalized, but the building will definitely have the defined sections in the façade so that it will not appear as one large mass. Commissioner Wallinger asked if the apartment entrance will be only in the rear of the building. Mr. Pinto-Martin responded that it will be, and that there will also be an open-air courtyard in the center of the building that will be accessible to tenants only.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ron Suriano, owner of the building on Barrett Street that is directly adjacent to the building’s rear façade, relayed his concerns regarding the loss of natural light in his building and the lack of adequate parking downtown. He stated that he is concerned that all of the residents will be entering the building from the alleyway between the buildings, and that this will lead to excessive noise and potential criminal activity. *Mr. Pinto-Martin stated that the building will only be three stories high, although they are allowed to build five stories, and will be setback 13 feet from the property line where a 5-foot setback is allowed. He added that all lighting in the alley will be downlighting to avoid light pollution. Regarding the parking, he explained that Redburn typically has waiting lists for its apartments, many of which do not offer onsite parking, and they do not believe that this will be a problem for their tenants or they obviously would not be moving ahead with this sizeable investment.* James Addison, resident of 30 Washington Avenue, stated that he has heard from various sources, including some at a recent City BZA meeting, that Redburn is not the most responsible landlord. He added that he questions whether the apartment market has become saturated and wonders if the applicants have explored other options such as condominiums. *Commissioner Wallinger noted that this building is an*

allowed use on this site and the Commission cannot dictate what the applicant chooses to do there as long as it is an allowed use and done according to City Code. Mr. Pinto-Martin added that Redburn has done a great deal of research into the demand for this product in the downtown area.

Seeing no further members of the public who wished to speak Commissioner Wallinger closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Wallinger asked Mr. Pinto-Martin if they had considered a locked gate on the alley so that it would be accessible only to tenants. Mr. Pinto-Martin stated that they had considered it but were not sure how the Commission would feel about it, but they would be happy to have a gate at the alley with a key fobbed entry. He added that there will also be security cameras all around the building with 24-hour monitoring.

Commissioner Lewis stated that he believes that the building design is in proper scale with its surroundings and is visually interesting and pedestrian friendly. Commissioner Wallinger agreed. She asked if they had considered adding street trees or some landscaping beds to the area in front of the building. Mr. Pinto-Martin stated that there is a large amount of underground utilities in the area, but that they have been talking with Metroplex to see if and where they could install street trees and landscaping without disturbing the utilities. He added that they would like to add significant greenspace because they feel that it will enhance the retail spaces.

Commissioner Wallinger commented that she has seen several sets of revised drawings and is happy with the direction in which the building design is progressing. Mr. Pinto-Martin briefly discussed the possible building materials and design elements, and it was determined that they would submit final plans to staff who would then circulate them to the Commissioners to make sure that they are not significantly different from what was discussed at the meeting and therefore would not require that the applicants return to the full Commission for further review. Commissioner Wallinger noted that in her experience it is best if the portions of the building that are shown as white on the plans are not stark white, as this often looks dirty and dingy very quickly. She added that the applicants might want to consider leaving the alley gate unlocked during the day, but that ultimately it is up to their discretion. Mr. Pinto-Martin stated that the key fob system allows them to have very specific control over the timing of the locks, and he does not believe there would be any objection to the alley remaining unlocked during daylight hours.

SEQR RESOLUTION

Motion by Commissioner Beach, seconded by Commissioner Healey, to accept the Negative Declaration.

Motion carried unanimously.

SITE PLAN APPROVAL

Motion by Commissioner Healey, seconded by Commissioner Bailey, to accept the proposal with the following conditions:

1. The address will be prominently displayed so that it is easily visible from State Street.
2. Metal roll gates and iron bars are not permitted on any doors or windows at any time in the future.
3. The applicant will submit an updated site plan and elevation drawings to the City Planner for final approval. The plans will include the final exterior materials and façade design, and the alley gate discussed at the meeting. The applicant will add green space to the front and side of the building where it is possible, given the location of the underground utilities.
4. The applicant must obtain an area variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals to allow for the lack of onsite parking for the residential units.
5. Prior to the opening of the first-floor retail businesses the tenants will submit their signage to City Planning staff for approval prior to the purchase or installation of the signs.
6. If during the course of construction changes become necessary, the applicant will return to City Planning staff for review and to the full Planning Commission for further consideration should the changes be deemed significant.

Motion carried unanimously.

C. JON AMSLER requests site plan approval pursuant to Section 264-90 K of a proposal to redevelop the site at 1545 Broadway, tax parcel # 49.37-1-21, located in a “C-2” Mixed-Use Commercial District.

Jon Amsler, and Joe Bianchini of ABD Engineers and Surveyors, presented the proposal.

Mr. Bianchini explained that the site was formerly a gas station and auto repair shop and was recently granted a use variance to allow for auto sales. He stated that Mr. Amsler will offer used cars for sale on the site and will also be making minor repairs on those vehicles. He noted Mr. Amsler plans minimal changes to the site but would like to close the second curb cut on Broadway to allow for better site circulation.

Commissioner Wallinger stated that a landscape buffer between the parking area and the sidewalk is required, as is the installation of street trees. She added that she agrees that the closing of the entrance is a good idea, but the proposed planters are not sufficient to meet the landscaping requirements, especially on a site such as this where there is a very large amount of paved surface. The Commissioners agreed.

Mr. Smith stated that the gas tanks on the property must be removed. Mr. Bianchini stated that they were removed several years ago, and he will provide documentation to the City. Commissioner Wallinger asked if the applicant intended to remove the former gas pump lights and sign boxes. Mr. Bianchini stated that he intends to use the light poles and will paint them and install new LED light fixtures. He added that the sign boxes will be removed, and planters will be added around the base. The Commissioners indicated that they had no objection to using the existing light poles.

The sign was briefly discussed and was decided that if the existing sign has the proper setback it may remain in its current location, but it must be a monument sign. It was determined that two street trees will be installed at either end of the lot, and the landscaped buffer along the back of the sidewalk. The Commissioners decided that the City Engineering Department should review the curb cut proposal and determine where the two entrance/exit locations should be.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

Commissioner Wallinger asked Mr. Amsler if he intends to paint the exterior of the building. Mr. Amsler responded that he does, but that he has not decided on colors yet. The Commissioners agreed that staff could approve the colors. Mr. Amsler agreed to submit them before painting. Commissioner Wallinger noted that the sidewalk appeared to be deteriorated in some spots. Mr. Bianchini stated that it is in good shape but do need to be swept, and the debris and gravel could be what Commissioner Wallinger is referring to. It was decided that the Engineering Department would determine whether the sidewalks are in satisfactory condition, and staff will follow up.

SITE PLAN APPROVAL

Motion by Commissioner Bailey, seconded by Commissioner Beach, to accept the proposal with the following conditions:

1. The address will be prominently displayed so that it is easily visible from Broadway.
2. Metal roll gates and iron bars are not permitted on any doors or windows at any time in the future.

3. The applicant will submit a final landscaping plan to City Planning staff for approval. The plan will include the items discussed at the meeting, including two street trees and a wider inground planting bed along the back of the sidewalk on Broadway.
4. The final sign design and location will be submitted to City Planning staff for final approval prior to installing the sign.
5. The existing light poles will have the boxes removed and the poles will be repainted, and new LED light fixtures will be installed.
6. Before painting the exterior of the building, the applicant will submit the paint colors to City Planning staff for final approval.
7. No more than 20% of the windowpanes may be covered with signs.
8. Banners, flags, and balloons are not allowed on the site.
9. The City Engineering Department will review and approve the proposed entrance and exit curb cuts, as well as determine whether the sidewalk is in satisfactory condition.

Motion carried unanimously.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS

None.

VII. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Beach, seconded by Commissioner Lewis, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:56 p.m.