



MEMORANDUM

CITY OF WATERTOWN, NEW YORK
PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
245 WASHINGTON STREET, ROOM 305, WATERTOWN, NY 13601
PHONE: 315-785-7741 – FAX: 315-782-9014

TO: Planning Commission Members

FROM: Michael A. Lumbis, Planning and Community Development Director

PRIMARY REVIEWER: Geoffrey Urda, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Zone Change – A northern portion of the 400 Block of Vanduzee Street

DATE: January 29, 2026

Request: To remove VL Main Street West, VL-8, VL-6, VL-4, 476, 470, 444 and a 0.75-acre section of 424 Vanduzee Street, Respective Parcel Numbers 1-19-103.000, 1-19-104.000, 1-18-105.000, 1-18-101.001, 1-18-104.000, 1-18-103.000, 1-18-103.001 and a section of Parcel Number 1-18-102.000, from the Waterfront Overlay District on the approved Zoning Map

Applicant: City of Watertown

Owner(s): City of Watertown, Walldroff Properties LLC, Nathaniel Okyere-Bour, Danielle Anderson, State Of New York, Chieftain Properties Inc.

SEQRA: Unlisted

County review: Yes

Comments: The City of Watertown has received a purchase offer from Walldroff Properties, LLC for a 0.75-acre section of 424 Vanduzee Street adjacent to the Jade Stone Engineering building at 444 Vanduzee Street. Walldroff Properties, LLC's stated intention is to assemble the acquired land with their existing property and construct a parking lot expansion. This would represent an expansion of the existing Office Use at 444 Vanduzee Street

Both properties are zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMU) and are within the Waterfront Overlay District. While the UMU District allows Office uses by Site Plan Approval, the Waterfront Overlay does not allow Offices anywhere within its boundaries. Therefore, as presently zoned, the existing Office use at 444 Vanduzee Street enjoys legal nonconforming ("grandfathered") status. Expanding a grandfathered use is only legal with the relief of a Use Variance granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).

The City is initiating this Zone Change request to remove the subject land from the Waterfront Overlay prior to initiating the property transfer to Walldroff Properties, LLC. The proposed rezoning includes all the parcels north of 424 and 444 Vanduzee Street on the east (inland) side of the street all the way to the intersection with Main Street West to avoid a gap in the Overlay.

The remaining lands of 424 Vanduzee Street and all other land extending south to the shore of the Black River would remain in the Waterfront Overlay, All the parcels on the west side of Vanduzee Street between the Main Street West and the Vanduzee Street bridge would remain in the Waterfront Overlay as well, as they all have rear parcel boundaries on the water's edge.

The existing Office Use would become an allowed use-by-right in the UMU District under the proposed rezoning and would allow Walldroff Properties, LLC to expand their parking lot with Site Plan Approval, as long as the resulting lot did not exceed 40 combined parking spaces.

Following the Zone Change, and before any Site Plan application, Walldroff Properties, LLC would need to apply to subdivide the 0.75-acre section of 424 Vanduzee Street prior to transferring ownership. Walldroff Properties, LLC would also need to file a new deed with the Jefferson County Clerk combining the land they acquired from the City into a single parcel with 444 Vanduzee Street.

Zoning and Comprehensive Plan: The City's adopted Comprehensive Plan recommends the future land use for this area as Black River Waterfront. The Comprehensive Plan's vision for this character area is below.

Black River Waterfront: *"The Black River is the spine of Watertown and a core part of the City's identity. As the primary natural asset, it is the basis for economic development, education, recreation, and scenic beauty. The intention of this Character Area is to build on the setting of the river as a reinforcing asset to redevelopment. New development and redevelopment should be oriented around the river in all aspects of design, including preserving views, increased public access where feasible, and integrating green infrastructure or low impact development design (e.g., rain gardens, porous pavers, native plantings, etc.) to treat stormwater runoff before entering the river. Buildings should be placed on the site so that they do not obstruct the public's enjoyment of the river whether physically or visually. Open space should be integrated and developed for all users regardless of abilities."*

The Waterfront Overlay exists to implement the Comprehensive Plan's vision for this character area and its stated purpose in the Zoning Ordinance quotes verbatim from the above vision statement. The dimensional and use constraints of the Waterfront Overlay are all aimed at allowing the waterfront to achieve its full potential.

However, while all of the parcels involved in the proposed rezoning are in the Black River Waterfront future land use character area, only the City-owned parcel at 424 Vanduzee Street actually abuts the shoreline, and that is at the south end of the parcel, which would remain in City ownership and remain within the Waterfront Overlay.

In addition, any future development, including the proposed parking lot expansion, should still remain consistent with the vision above, and Staff would evaluate such consistency as part of any future Site Plan review.

The 400-block of Vanduzee Street is also on the edge of the Black River Waterfront future land use character area, as the CSX Railroad tracks are the approximate border with the Corridor Mixed Use future land use character area that primarily encompasses the Main Street West arterial corridor. The Comprehensive Plan's vision for this character area is below.

***Corridor Mixed Use:** "Watertown has a number of mixed-use corridors radiating out from the center of the City. While each of these corridors generally serve the local and regional population, they exhibit different characters. Areas along Coffeen, Washington, and State Streets have a mixture of residential and commercial uses where the commercial uses are often in converted large residential structures. Buildings are set back a modest distance from the road, parking is typically behind or at the side of the building, and there are sidewalks that connect to the adjacent neighborhoods. The intent of these areas is to preserve the urban form and limit intrusion of suburban character (i.e., parking in front, large signs, franchise architecture), as well as to serve as gateways into the City. New development and redevelopment should consider pedestrians, bicycles, and transit as a means of integrating into the urban fabric."*

Regarding the boundaries between the land use character areas on the future land use map, the Comprehensive Plan states:

"The land use areas depicted on the Future Land Use Map have deliberately blurred edges between the districts. This is meant to graphically reinforce the conceptual and visionary nature of future land use planning. While the map is intended to inform a future zoning map, the boundaries do not follow property lines and should not be interpreted as specific edges of new zoning districts."

In this instance, the block requested for rezoning falls immediately adjacent to one of the blurred edges discussed above. Since the parcels proposed for removal from the Waterfront Overlay are on the opposite side of VanDuzee Street from the shore and all of them are over 100 feet from the water's edge, removing the subject land from the Overlay will not compromise the intent of the Comprehensive Plan to protect views and utilize riverfront land to its highest and fullest potential. This zone change request is in harmony with the Comprehensive Plan.

SEQR: There are two significant State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) considerations for the required environmental review. The first is the need to consider the "whole action" and the second is the need for a Coordinated Review.

The SEQR Handbook states that *"Proposals or parts of proposals that are related to each other closely enough to be, in effect, a single course of action should be evaluated as one whole action."* This means that the Lead Agency would need to evaluate the environmental impacts of all facets of the proposed action, up to and including the impacts of constructing the parking lot expansion.

In addition, as amending the Zoning Map is a legislative act, the City Council retains sole authority to adopt amendments. The City Council is also the only body empowered to authorize the sale of City-owned land. Because the "whole action" requires approval from two different boards (the City Council for the Zone Change and sale of City property, and the Planning Commission for Subdivision Approval and Site Plan Approval), a Coordinated Review is required under SEQRA, with one body acting as the Lead Agency and the other as an Involved Agency.

The City Council adopted a Resolution at its January 20, 2026 meeting declaring its intent to act as Lead Agency. The Planning Commission, unless it has any objections, would act as an Involved Agency.

Staff has completed a State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) Short Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) as part of the application for the zone change. The City Council, as the lead agency, will complete Part 2 of the EAF. As an Involved Agency, Planning Commission members should communicate to Staff any comments or observations related to the “whole action,” including the proposed Subdivision and site development, so that Staff can communicate that information to the City Council prior to the completion of the SEQR process.

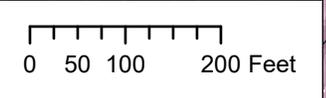
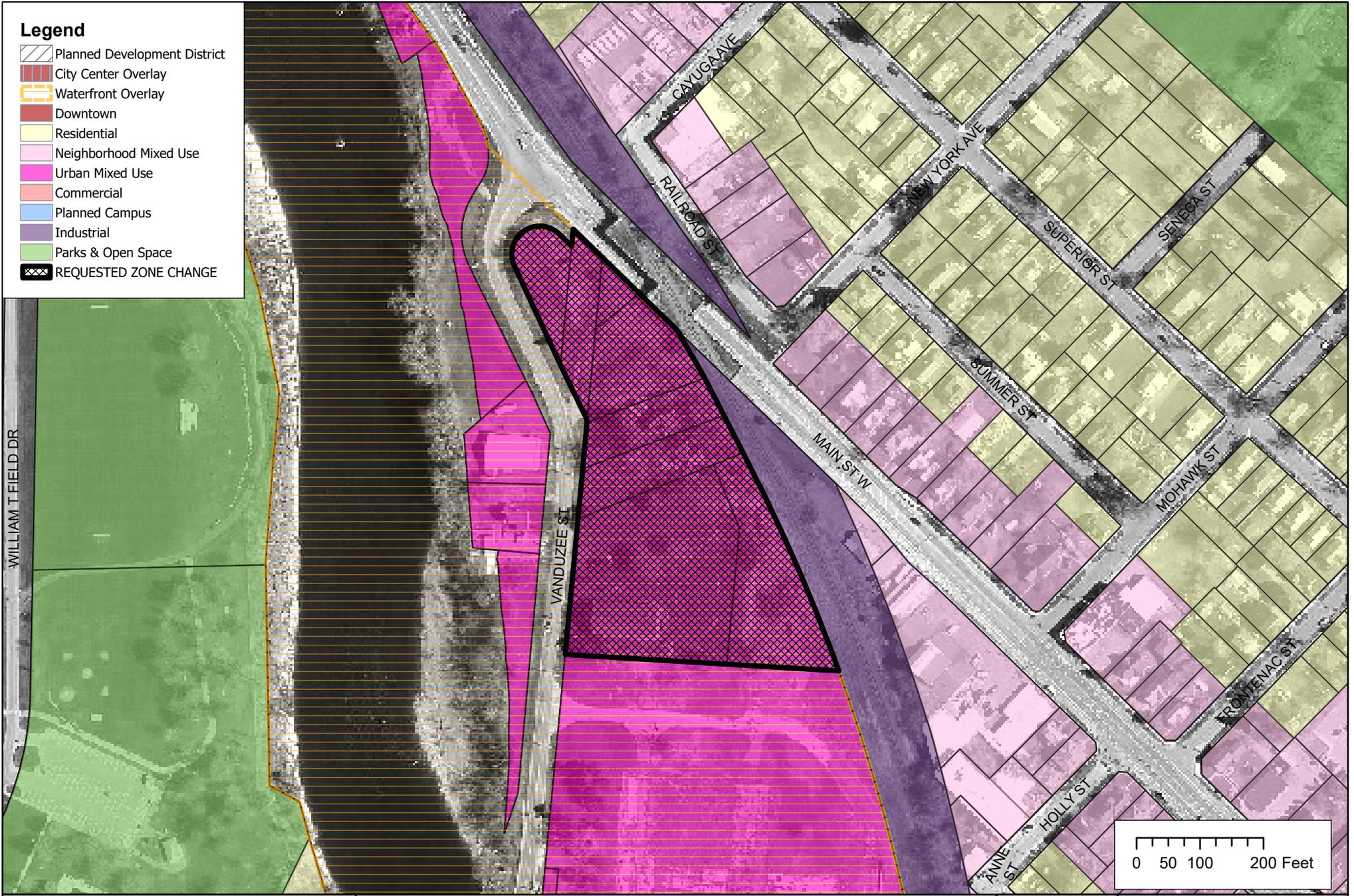
Planning Commission Action: If the Planning Commission deems it appropriate, it should adopt a motion acknowledging that the City Council is the most appropriate agency to act as Lead Agency for the proposed project at 424 VanDuzee Street. which will minimally include the proposed Zone Change, Subdivision Approval, property transfer and Site Plan Approval.

The Planning Commission is also responsible for making a recommendation to the City Council regarding the proposal to remove of VL Main Street West, VL-8, VL-6, VL-4, 476, 470, 444 and a 0.75-acre section of 424 Vanduzee Street from the Waterfront Overlay District.

cc: City Council Members
Thomas Compo, P.E., City Engineer

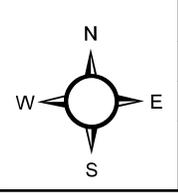
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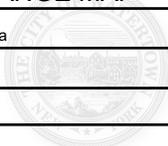
-  Planned Development District
-  City Center Overlay
-  Waterfront Overlay
-  Downtown
-  Residential
-  Neighborhood Mixed Use
-  Urban Mixed Use
-  Commercial
-  Planned Campus
-  Industrial
-  Parks & Open Space
-  REQUESTED ZONE CHANGE



CITY OF WATERTOWN GIS
 245 WASHINGTON STREET
 2ND FLOOR
 WATERTOWN, NEW YORK 13601
 (315) 785-7793
 gis@watertown-ny.gov

Waterfront Overlay/Urban Mixed Use to Urban Mixed Use
 VL Main Street West, VL-8, VL-6, VL-4, 476, 470, 444 Vanduzee Street, and a 0.75-acre northern section of 424 Vanduzee Street
 (1-19-103.000, 1-19-104.000, 1-19-105.000, 1-18-101.001, 1-18-104.000, 1-18-103.000, 1-18-103.001, 1-18-102.000)
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ZONE CHANGE MAP	
Requested By: G. Urda	
Author: mowen	
Date: 1/21/2026	
Scale : 1 in= 200 ft	