



CITY OF WATERTOWN, NEW YORK
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
ROOM 305, WATERTOWN CITY HALL
245 WASHINGTON STREET
WATERTOWN, NEW YORK 13601-3380
(315) 785-7741

MEETING: JUNE 6, 2023

PRESENT:

Larry Coburn, Chairperson
TJ Babcock
Michelle Capone
Linda Fields
Lynn Godek
Neil Katzman

ALSO:

Michael A. Lumbis, Planning and Community
Development Director
Jennifer Voss, Senior Planner
Geoffrey Urda, Planner
Sharlice Bonello, Planner
Meredith Griffin, Civil Engineer II
Gertrude Karris, Secretary

ABSENT: NONE

Michelle Capone called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. Ms. Capone then asked for a motion to accept the minutes from the May 2, 2023, Planning Commission meeting. Ms. Fields made a motion to accept the minutes as written, Mr. Katzman seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

**SUBDIVISION FINAL PLAT APPROVAL
VL3 COMMERCE PARK DRIVE
PARCEL NUMBER 8-50-101.009**

and

**SITE PLAN APPROVAL
VL1, VL2, AND A PORTION OF VL3 COMMERCE PARK DRIVE
PARCEL NUMBERS 8-50-106.000, 8-50-105.000,
AND THE NORTHERN HALF OF 8-50-101.009**

Ms. Capone addressed the applicant and the Planning Commission. She noted that both the Subdivision and Site Plan applications submitted by DePaul Properties are for the same project. She said that both applications have a list of issues and items that the applicant will need to discuss after the public hearing for the Subdivision. She then said that the Planning Commission would need to table both applications pending formal establishment of the Lead Agency pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

Ms. Capone then asked if the applicant would address the Commission and describe their vision for this project and discuss a few of the Summary Items in Staff's Memorandums.

Mr. Dan Brocht, of LaBella Associates, then introduced himself as the Civil Engineer and project manager working with the DePaul team. Mr. Brocht said that the team has reviewed the Summary Items and he is prepared to address them. He noted that DePaul and LaBella would appear before the Zoning Board of Appeals for two Area Variances: first-floor transparency and spacing between functional entryways on the front of the building.

Ms. Capone then clarified that the site plan and related subdivision are considered Unlisted Actions under the State Environmental Quality Review Act and reiterated that because other agencies are involved, a coordinated SEQRA review is necessary.

Ms. Capone then noted that it was time for the public hearing. She called the public hearing to order at 6:06 p.m., read the legal notice that had been published in the *Watertown Daily Times* and asked for public comment on the request. Hearing no comments, Ms. Capone closed the public hearing at 6:07 p.m. and invited the applicant to continue discussing the Site Plan.

Mr. Brocht then stated that the project consisted of a four-story building with 120 residential units and approximately 90 parking spaces. He explained that the Site Plan was put together using the new Zoning Ordinance and in consultation with the City Planning Department. He noted that because of a wet area on the property, the building is located closer to the road than originally planned. Mr. Brocht stated that he was confident that his team could adjust the site plan to comply with the landscaping requirements.

Ms. Capone asked what kind of housing this project will provide and what strategies DePaul will utilize to help make the building fit into the community.

Jon Penna, General Counsel for DePaul Properties then addressed the Commission. Mr. Penna explained that DePaul has been in business since the 1980s, developing assisted living and multifamily affordable housing and described this project as a multifamily affordable housing development.

Mr. Penna stated that DePaul has specific goals when bringing housing into a community; specifically, that DePaul wants the housing to be beautiful and an aesthetic improvement to a community and that DePaul is committed to affordable housing. He said that for tenants that meet the income guidelines, the apartments will rent for between \$750 and \$900 per month.

Mr. Penna then discussed the importance of making the building accessible. He said that 25 percent of the units will be built with accessibility features and that the building will have an elevator. He said that an additional 25 percent of the units will be handicap ready so they can easily be converted to an accessible unit. Mr. Penna went on to describe DePaul's commitment to safety, noting that the building will be equipped with cameras and that security staff would be present after hours and on the weekends, meaning that building staff would be available to the tenants 24/7. Mr. Penna also noted that the cameras have been a helpful tool for law enforcement when dealing with incidents that happen outside and on the nearby street and sidewalk.

Mr. Penna then added that the rent includes utilities, internet, and onsite laundry facilities. Additionally, Mr. Penna stated that DePaul always incorporates a service component in their housing projects. He said that 50 percent of the units would be for tenants that are eligible for

services, and a services coordinator will be available on site to help residents get connected to services that will help them live independently. Mr. Penna went on to explain that DePaul would reserve 25-to-30 service eligible units for Veterans, and the remainder will be a mix of residents, including seniors.

Ms. Fields then asked if these will be Section 8 apartments. Mr. Penna noted that law requires that they accept Section 8 vouchers, but this is not considered a Section 8 building.

Ms. Fields then asked why the building had so few two-bedroom apartments. Mr. Dan Glading, Senior Project Architect with SWBR Architects, explained that the building will have five (5) two-bedroom apartments, 91 one-bedroom apartments and the rest would be studios. Mr. Glading said that DePaul has found that the demand for one-bedroom and studio apartments is much greater in these buildings and DePaul believes this is the most successful model for this kind of affordable housing. Mr. Glading then added that every apartment has a bulk storage space within the apartment which can provide space to store bicycles, suitcases, and other items.

Ms. Fields asked the applicant to review the need for lighting in the front of the building to provide safety for the residents.

Ms. Capone read the Summary Items from the Staff Memo which are to be addressed by the applicant. Ms. Griffin then asked the applicant to review the plans for the north side of the property to ensure that new landscaping not be planted near the storm drains and existing sanitary clean outs. Mr. Penna acknowledged the applicant is aware of these issues.

Mr. Urda then said that the City prefers that the crosswalk across Commerce Park Drive be located on the north side of the site, near the Gaffney Drive roundabout to take advantage of the traffic calming that the circle provides.

Ms. Godek, Mr. Lumbis, and Mr. Penna discussed the tree-planting plans, and there was general agreement that a variety of trees should be planted to avoid a total loss should a catastrophic species-specific disease be contracted.

Mr. Glading reviewed a drawing of the exterior of the building and showed the plan for the locations of the first-floor entrances. Mr. Glading discussed the materials to be used, and how DePaul is working to make the exterior design elements comply with the City Zoning Ordinance.

Ms. Capone asked the board for a motion to table the Subdivision application. Ms. Fields then moved to table the request submitted by submitted by DePaul Properties for a two-lot subdivision of **VL3 Commerce Park Drive**, Parcel Number 8-50-101.009. Mr. Babcock seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Ms. Capone then asked for the board for a motion to table the Site Plan application. Ms. Fields then moved to table the request submitted by DePaul Properties to construct a 115,063 SF, 120-unit four-story apartment building at **VL1, VL2 and VL3 Commerce Park Drive**, Parcel Numbers 8-50-106.000, 8-50-105.000 and 8-50-101.009. Mr. Babcock seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

**SITE PLAN APPROVAL
155 CLINTON STREET
PARCEL NUMBER 10-07-109.100**

Mr. Michael Lundy of Design Build Innovations, LLC has submitted an application to construct a 2,378 SF building addition, a 253 SF building addition and a 9,500 SF parking lot expansion at 155 Clinton Street, Parcel Number 10-07-109.100 and was present to discuss the application.

Ms. Capone informed Mr. Lundy that there are several outstanding issues in Staff's Memorandum and that the Planning Commission would table the application until these conditions were satisfied. Ms. Capone then asked Mr. Lundy if he would like to address the board and discuss his vision for the project.

Mr. Lundy explained that the project had received Site Plan Approval a little over three years prior, and that because of other business and the COVID-19 Pandemic, the project was put on hold. He acknowledged that the that previous Site Plan Approval had now expired but that his current plan was still to develop an office building on the site.

Mr. Lundy stated that he would be applying for an Area Variance for relief from the first-floor transparency requirement. Mr. Lundy stated that he believes the transparency requirements are not appropriate for this kind of building and that his proposed design using natural materials to create a North Country feel, does not lend itself to a 75 percent first-floor transparency requirement.

Additionally, Mr. Lundy stated that the parking area is crucial to this property and without the parking area, the project will not happen. Mr. Lundy noted that additional construction details required per Staff's Memorandum can be handled easily.

Ms. Capone and Mr. Lundy then further discussed the use of the Zoning Board of Appeals to deal with requests for relief from the Zoning Ordinance requirements for first floor transparency and if necessary, the parking guidelines.

Discussion continued regarding the length of time that a previously approved Site Plan remains valid. Ms. Capone noted that the Zoning Ordinance allows for a site plan approved under the old zoning ordinance to be valid for a period of three years from the date of approval. The previous Site Plan Approval for this property was more than three years old.

Mr. Lundy informed the Commission that the pile of dirt currently sitting in the parking lot would be used to fill the footprint (basement) of the western building on the lot proposed for demolition.

Mr. Urda then addressed the applicant and stated that he believes the ZBA will realize that the 75 percent first-floor transparency requirement is not realistic for this property. Mr. Urda explained that one of the hardship tests for an Area Variance is whether the hardship applies to a substantial portion of the district or neighborhood or is unique to the subject parcel. Mr. Urda then said that this site is unlike most others in the Downtown Zoning District and that he was confident

the ZBA would be willing to work with the applicant and the project would move forward. Mr. Urda also stated that Staff and the Planning Commission cannot waive the Transportation Demand Management Plan requirement, but it should not be difficult to justify why the parking lot is reasonable.

Ms. Capone requested that Mr. Lundy submit written plans and a complete application as soon as possible so that the Planning Commission could review it.

Ms. Capone asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Katzman then moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Godek seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Gertrude Mead Karris
Secretary