



MEMORANDUM

CITY OF WATERTOWN PLANNING OFFICE
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TO: Planning Board Members
FROM: Michael A. Lumbis, Planner
SUBJECT: Site Plan Approval – 131 Washington Street
DATE: November 25, 2015

Request: Site plan approval for the construction of an approximately 4,266 square foot, three-story addition and a 14-space parking lot located at 131 Washington St., Parcel Number 11-01-213.000.

Applicant: Northern New York Community Foundation

Proposed Use: New offices and meeting space for the Northern New York Community Foundation

Property Owner: Northern New York Community Foundation

Submitted:

Property Survey: Yes	Preliminary Architectural Drawings: Yes
Site Plan: Yes	Preliminary Site Engineering Plans: Yes
Vehicle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan: No	Construction Time Schedule: No
Landscaping and Grading Plan: Yes	Description of Uses, Hours & Traffic Volume: Uses and Traffic Volume are included. The applicant does not indicate operating hours.

SEQRA: Type I

County Review: Yes

Zoning Information:

District: Downtown	Maximum Lot Coverage: 100%
Setback Requirements: F: 0', S: 0', R: 0'	Buffer Zones Required: No

Project Overview: The Northern New York Community Foundation proposes to renovate the existing Black River Valley Club property and convert the building into offices and meeting rooms for the NNY Philanthropy Center. The proposed project would begin with removing the existing 9,828 square foot two-story section at the rear of the building. This section was not part of the original 1906 structure. Following the proposed removal, the applicant then proposes to construct a new, three-story 4,266 square foot addition onto the rear of the original 1906 structure to replace the existing two-story section.

The applicant then proposes using the remainder of the site to construct a new parking lot. The applicant also proposes removing the existing retaining wall and all of the existing asphalt at the southeast end of the site and constructing a new retaining wall and repaving the area for the proposed parking lot.

Parking and Vehicle/Pedestrian Circulation: Vehicular access to the site will be via the existing asphalt driveway that extends southeast from Washington Street to the proposed parking lot at the rear of the building. The driveway is located on the neighboring property but the applicant has a 10' wide common easement in this area that provides access to the rear of their property. The applicant proposes 14 parking spaces, including one handicapped space. There is no minimum parking requirement, as the Zoning Ordinance does not require any off-street parking in the Downtown District.

The applicant proposes a one-way drive aisle in the parking lot with one entrance and one exit connecting to the driveway from Washington Street. The applicant proposes a long, narrow landscaped island to separate the proposed lot from the asphalt driveway and to delineate the entrance and exit points. The easternmost parking space presents a safety concern, and it will not be allowed. This parking space should be removed from the site plan to allow the neighboring parked car room to maneuver when leaving the adjacent parking space.

The City's site plan application requires the applicant to clearly show the site's proposed vehicular and pedestrian traffic circulation, including a delivery or refuse vehicle entering and exiting the property. The applicant shall provide a traffic circulation map showing that a delivery or refuse vehicle can navigate the site. This plan should also show the turning movements of a City fire truck. On the north side of the building there is a 12' driveway that runs in between the Black River Valley Club and the YMCA. This 12' width must be maintained to provide secondary access for the Fire Department to the YMCA parking lot.

Floor plans appear to show the door fronting on Washington Street operating as an alternate entrance for pedestrians. During a previous meeting, the applicant mentioned that this would function as an exit-only door. If this is still what is planned, then pedestrian access to enter the building would be exclusively via the proposed addition at the rear of the building, meaning that pedestrians would have to use a private sidewalk on the neighbor's property, and a crosswalk across the neighbor's private driveway, in order to access the building.

The applicant should clarify whether pedestrians will be able to access the building via the front door on Washington Street, or whether they would have to walk around to the rear of the building in order to enter. If they need to enter at the rear of the building, the applicant should provide the City with details on how this access will be granted by the neighboring owner. The existing 10' wide common easement may provide for this access or an additional easement or permission from the property owner may be needed.

Landscaping and Buffers: The applicant proposes removing the two existing Green Ash trees in front of the building and planting a pair of Cleveland Select Callery Pear trees in their place. This will serve two purposes. First, the two existing trees are under imminent threat from the Emerald Ash Borer and replacing them with an alternate species will ensure the continued existence of two street trees in this location. Second, replacing them with smaller trees will increase visibility of the restored historic façade from Washington Street.

The applicant also proposes a 4' wide landscaped island to separate the proposed parking lot from the asphalt driveway and to delineate the entrance and exit points from the driveway to the lot. The applicant proposes nine trees in this landscaped island. The Planning Board's adopted Landscaping and Buffer Zone Guidelines recommend a landscaped strip around the perimeter of any parking lot, exclusive of driveways, and recommends that such a landscaped strip be 8' wide. In this instance, the site constraints limit the width of the island but the 4' width is acceptable for the vehicular circulation purpose for which the island is intended. It will also provide some landscaping to buffer the proposed lot.

The applicant also proposes a landscaped area in front of the eastern façade of the proposed building expansion. The planting area would face the proposed parking lot and would include four different species of small trees and shrubs. A small island with a honeylocust tree is also planned for the northeast corner of the parking lot.

SEQR: The entire parcel is contained within the Public Square Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Black River Valley Club is specifically identified in the list of properties included in the Public Square Historic District on the district's Nomination Form. According to Chapter 6, Part 617.4(b)(9) of the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York, the following is considered a Type I Action: "Any Unlisted action (unless the action is designed for the preservation of the facility or site) occurring wholly or partially within, or substantially contiguous to, any historic building, structure, facility, site or district or prehistoric site that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or that has been proposed by the New York State Board on Historic Preservation for a recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer for nomination for inclusion in the National Register, or that is listed on the State Register of Historic Places."

While the applicant is proposing to undertake several preservation efforts, which are described below, the proposed project still involves the removal of over half of the existing structure. As such, the project is not solely designed for the preservation of the facility or the site, and thus it does not qualify for the exemption described in the State Code above. Therefore, the proposed action is a Type I Action, and it will require the completion of a SEQR Full Environmental Assessment Form (EAF).

The City Council of the City of Watertown will act as the lead agency under SEQR in the review process. Staff has not identified any other involved agencies for the project, although it has identified one interested agency. Thus, the City Council is the appropriate entity to act as the lead agency in this review.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's SEQR Handbook states in Chapter 3, Section G, that although there is no obligation for the lead agency to coordinate review with interested agencies, it may do so if appropriate. The SEQR Handbook explicitly states that interested agencies may be contacted as a courtesy to keep them informed of actions that may affect them, and that an interested agency may participate in the SEQR process in an advisory capacity.

The New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is an interested agency in this matter. Exterior modifications to a historic structure clearly fall under SHPO's area of expertise. Staff will be submitting the details of the proposed project to SHPO to solicit their input on behalf of City Council. The Council, acting as the lead agency, will take SHPO's review and comments under advisement when making its determination of significance under SEQR.

Historic Preservation: As mentioned above, the Black River Valley Club building is included in the Public Square Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The original Colonial Revival-style structure was built in 1906, and the rear addition, which the applicant proposes to remove, was built in 1923-24.

Prominent architectural details on the west (front) and south sides of the original structure include the modillions and dentils that are prominent in the entablature, the belt courses beneath the attic story and second story windows, the Palladian window above the central entrance, keystone lintels above the other first and second story windows, the Classical columns on the portico, and the fanlight and sidelights that surround the front door.

Many of these historically significant features have fallen into decay. The applicant proposes restoring these and other features on the western and southern facades, replacing various elements in-kind when necessary and using matching white paint to maintain these sides of the building in their original 1906 appearance as much as possible.

The proposed addition will create an eastern façade that looks significantly different from the south and the west. However, the original eastern façade was already lost as a result of the 1923-24 addition. Any concerns about the proposed eastern façade will be considered by SHPO as a part of their review.

The majority of the existing northern façade is absent any significant historical features.

Setbacks and Parcel Boundaries: According to the Survey Plat provided by the applicant, the southern property line is only 1' south of the edge of the original building. There are no required setbacks in the Downtown Zoning District, so the building edge is legal. However, much of the proposed utility work occurs on the neighbor's

property at 215 Washington Street, and some of it necessitates the removal of pavement and a grassed area on the neighbor's property.

The applicant must provide a letter from the neighboring property owner authorizing the applicant to apply for site plan approval for all work to be performed on the parcel at 215 Washington Street, including any utility work, pavement, striping, staging etc. This letter must also acknowledge that the neighboring property owner is aware of all impacts of the underground utility work that the applicant proposes, including tying into the 8" water lateral on the neighboring parcel. The applicant must also provide copies of all required easements for underground utilities located on adjacent properties.

The proposed fire escape on the north side of the building will encroach on the neighboring YMCA parcel at 121 Washington Street. In addition, the fire escape would narrow the driveway width on this side to less than the 12' width that must be maintained for fire access. Any fire escape must be set back a minimum of 5' from the parcel boundary and cannot encroach into the 12' driveway. The applicant should address this issue.

Lighting: The site plan depicts a "site lighting fixture" on the proposed landscaped island. The applicant must provide a photometric plan that provides light pole and fixture details and depicts lighting levels on the site.

Utilities and Hydrology: A fire flow analysis shall be included in the Engineering Report and an updated hydrant flow test shall be performed to verify adequate hydraulic capacity exists to serve the renovated building. The hydraulic analysis shall also include the effect of the new connection on the adjacent building to the south. Any required outside hose allowances or fire protection demand (sprinklers) need to be included in the projected hydraulic analysis. The proposed water connection will not be allowed on the adjacent private property and should be relocated to connect to the 8" main within the City margin, at a location to be determined by the Water Department.

Site Plan Document Comments: The site plan, as submitted, is currently missing and should be revised to include all of the following: A Land Use and Zoning Table of Requirements, all existing and proposed easements and rights-of-way, labels for all curb radii, the locations of any proposed fire escapes and space for snow storage. The site plan legend should be updated to include all line types; i.e. stormwater, water, property line, margin, etc.

Also, Sheet Numbers ADD100 and C102 indicate that a new concrete walk along Washington Street will be constructed; however, the site plan on Sheet Number C101 does not. The applicant must show all proposed work on the site plan.

The site plan also erroneously depicts some existing conditions on the neighboring property at 215 Washington Street. The site plan depicts a stone wall running between the asphalt driveway and the concrete sidewalk for the length of the sidewalk that runs adjacent to the north side of the building at 215 Washington Street. In reality, the stone wall is on the other side of the sidewalk, acting as a retaining wall for the landscaped area adjacent to the building. There is only a curb where this sidewalk abuts the asphalt driveway, and the curb ends prior to the handicapped landing at the eastern corner of the building. The applicant shall amend the site plan to reflect existing conditions accurately.

Permits: The property owner must obtain the following permits, minimally, prior to construction: Demolition Permit, Building Permit, Water Supply Permit, Storm Sewer Permit and Fence Permit.

Miscellaneous: No hours of operation are indicated on the application. The applicant should indicate the proposed hours of operation. Review by the Jefferson County Planning Board, pursuant to General Municipal Law Section 239-m, will be required for this project. Staff will be referring a copy of the application to the County for review at the December 29 County Planning Board meeting.

Other Engineering Comments: The City of Watertown Engineering Department has the following additional comments and concerns. The Engineering Report should provide a detailed calculation of projected water and sewer use. The Engineering report should provide drainage calculations. It is understood that runoff should

decrease, but the sizing of the stormwater infrastructure is required to determine if adequate capacity exists. Stormwater calculations shall include any offsite drainage.

The applicant should explain how the construction process would achieve sediment and erosion control along with offsite tracking control. The applicant should provide details of how this project will connect to existing catch basins. The applicant should provide an indication of a staging area for both the demolition of the existing building and construction of the new building. Demolition plans should indicate measures for adequate protection of the public (including signage, fencing, etc.) during the removal of the building and the retaining wall, as well as what areas, if any will be fenced off during construction.

Summary:

1. The applicant shall provide a pedestrian and vehicular circulation plan that shows the movements of a delivery or refuse vehicle as well as City fire truck.
2. If the primary pedestrian access is at the rear of the building, the applicant should provide the City with details on how this access will be granted by the neighboring owner, whether it is through the existing 10' wide common easement, through a new easement or some other permission from the property owner.
3. The applicant shall submit a signed SEQR Full Environmental Assessment Form prior to the City Council considering the site plan for approval.
4. The applicant shall obtain a letter from the neighboring property owner at 215 Washington Street that authorizes the applicant to apply for site plan approval for all work to be performed on the neighbor's property. This letter must indicate that the neighboring property owner acknowledges all impacts of the underground utility work that the applicant proposes.
5. The applicant must provide copies of all required easements for underground utilities on adjacent properties.
6. The applicant should address the issue of the proposed fire escape on the north side of the building encroaching on the neighboring YMCA parcel and blocking the fire department access to the rear of that property.
7. The applicant shall provide a photometric plan that provides light pole and fixture details and depicts lighting levels on the site.
8. The applicant shall include a hydraulic analysis in the Engineering Report and perform an updated hydrant flow test to verify adequate hydraulic capacity exists to serve the renovated building.
9. The proposed water connection located on the adjacent private property shall be relocated to connect to the 8-inch main within the City margin, at a location to be determined by the Water Department.
10. The applicant must address all concerns listed in the "Site Plan Document Comments" section to the satisfaction of the City of Watertown Engineering Department.
11. The applicant must address all of the design details noted above in the "Other Engineering Comments" section and submit them to the Engineering Department prior to the issuance of any City permits.
12. The applicant shall indicate the proposed hours of operation.
13. The applicant must obtain, minimally, the following permits prior to construction: Building Permit, Storm Sewer Connection Permit, Sidewalk Permit, General City Permit and a Sign Permit.

cc: City Council Members
Robert J. Slye, City Attorney
Brian Drake, Civil Engineer II
Andrew Jackson, Bernier, Carr & Associates
Rande Richardson, Northern New York Community Foundation