



Watertown City Council
Monday, September 23, 2019
7:00 p.m.

WORK SESSION AGENDA

Discussion Items:

- a. Update on Thompson Park Pool and Bathhouse Project (verbal report).
- b. Discuss redevelopment plans for 75 Public Square based on report findings, letter from the owners, and architectural renderings that outline and illustrate the conceptual design plans for the building.

September 19, 2019

To: Richard M. Finn, City Manager

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

Subject: Strauss Walkway – 77-79 Public Square

As you know, Michael Pierce and Kenneth Bodah, the owners of 75 Public Square (formerly the Wind & Wire Music Building) have been working on design options and the redevelopment plans for their property over the course of the last year. In general, the plans will involve a new façade, a new roof, significant repairs to the exterior walls and the build out of commercial space in addition to plumbing, electrical and HVAC upgrades. Attached to this report is a letter from the owners along with architectural renderings that outline and illustrate the conceptual design plans for the building.

The City partnered with the owners on this project last year by applying for funding for a portion of the improvements from New York State's Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) for a grant through the New York Main Street Program. Although the grant application was unsuccessful, the owners have continued to move forward with their plans to bring this blighted building located on the north side of Public Square, back to life.

As they worked with their architect and contractor on different design options, they discovered that there is a common wall with the adjacent property located at 77-79 Public Square. The adjacent property is owned by the City and is the parcel that contains the Strauss Walkway. The shared ownership of the building wall presents a challenge to the redevelopment efforts as it limits what can be done with the Wind & Wire parcel and raises questions about shared maintenance and who would be responsible for future repairs.

Mr. Pierce and Mr. Bodah have inquired about the possibility of purchasing the property from the City to aid in their redevelopment efforts, continue the economic renaissance of downtown and help with their efforts to attract a quality tenant that could use a portion of outdoor space for their business. A purchase would also allow them to pursue one of their conceptual ideas for their building which would be to construct an elevated deck to create additional outdoor space.

The property that the Strauss Walkway is built on was donated to the City in 1984 by H. Michael and Bernice C. Strauss after a fire consumed the building in 1968. The walkway was built in honor of the Strauss' late son Michael W. Strauss who died in 1982.

The City Council resolution from 1984 that approved the acceptance of the property from the Strauss family states that should the City and the grantors (Mr. and Mrs. Strauss) agree that the property is required for an alternative purpose for use in conjunction with future development of the north side of Public Square, that the City will then provide a suitable alternative memorial in memory of the grantor's son. Mr. and Mrs. Strauss have since passed away but Staff has reached out to some members of the Strauss Family to discuss the proposal.

As part of a potential sale agreement, Mr. Pierce and Mr. Bodah have indicated that they would be willing to continue to allow pedestrian traffic through the newly designed space from the J.B. Wise Parking Lot to the businesses on Public Square during normal business hours. This public access could continue to be named Strauss Memorial Walkway or a different location for the memorial could be developed.

As an alternative, improvements could be made to the public walkway that is located next to the Woodruff Professional Building. Improvements at this location could include new landscaping, lighting, signage, etc., and could be paid for using the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) funds. Benefits to this approach would be that the walkway itself would be in a more visible location and with the improvements, it could help draw attention to the walkway for pedestrians trying to make their way to the riverfront and for motorists trying to find the J.B. Wise Parking Lot.

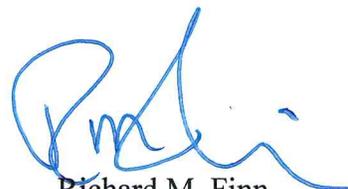
Discussions with Strauss family members were positive and they generally supported the proposal for the City to sell the property while at the same time maintaining and/or improving the memorial to Mr. Strauss.

Mr. Pierce will be in attendance at the work session to present and discuss the proposal and answer any questions that the City Council may have.

September 19, 2019

Mayor and City Council:

The proposed sale of the Strauss Walkway provides our downtown with an excellent opportunity for positive downtown development. A presentation will be made Monday at an upcoming work session. Based on staff's thorough review, it is recommended that the City Council authorize the staff to develop a written agreement providing for the sale of the Strauss Walkway.



Richard M. Finn
City Manager

September 16, 2019

Watertown City Council

Watertown City Manager / Staff

In June 2018, we purchased the property located at 75 Public Square. The building is in very poor condition and we have been working with an architect over the last year on plans to redevelop the property and get rid of the last remainder of blight on Public Square. We submit the following information as an update to our redevelopment of the property located at 75 Public Sq.

As we worked with our architect and contractor through various design options, we discovered there is a common wall with the adjacent property, 77-79 Public Sq. (Strauss Walkway), owned by the City. As discussions took place in advance of construction, we needed to identify a remedy for the reconstruction of the common wall adjoining the two properties.

We have met with the City Manager and staff to discuss our plans and the best way to move forward with construction given the joint ownership of the outside wall. We shared with them the designs for development, and our desire to acquire 77-79 Public Square property. Acquiring the property will allow us to include that space into our final design concept for re-development of both of those parcels on Public Square and provide for greater economic development in our downtown. Staff directed us to share our plans with City Council, as they would need to approve the sale of the real property.

Attached to this report are the drawings that our Architect has prepared to show you the finalized design concept for the properties.

Currently, 77-79 Public Square serves as a pedestrian walkway, developed as a result of a burned building back in the 1970's. This walkway provides access to Public Square from the JB Wise Parking Lot. Over the years, the walkway has become in need of many repairs. The type of repairs range from structural to both the walkway and adjacent common building walls, masonry of the walls, lighting along with ongoing maintenance, such as snow removal. We have sought out preliminary estimates for the maintenance work needed within the existing walkway and have come to realize the type of work and the contractor necessary to perform the work would carry a substantial cost to implement and maintain going forward. Allowing us to acquire the property would relieve the City of all maintenance costs, while still allowing for limited use of the space as a walkway during business hours.

Since the creation of the Strauss walkway, the City has established two new access points to the JB Wise Lot for connectability to Public Square. At the western end, there is a sidewalk along Anthony Street that provides a walkway that is open, illuminated and meets ADA requirements. Additionally, the other access point is at the eastern end of the lot along Mill Street at ground elevation with very easy accessibility.

We would like to present a plan to utilize the existing walkway space to provide economic development and long-term sustainability while benefiting the City of adding the parcel back onto the tax rolls.

What we are proposing for the space would offer an open-air space for use in and around the dining and entertainment experience being created on Public Square. As previously mentioned, we would allow pedestrian traffic through the new designed space from JB Wise lot during normal business hours of the establishments along the northern side of Public Square.

This development would improve an area of Public Square that is in much need of attention and it mitigates a safety issue with the existing space that has developed over the years.

We are confident we can develop the space more economically and create an opportunity to continue to enhance the overall aesthetic appeal of the Public Square area as a whole.

We respectfully seek your consideration for our purchase of the property located at 77-79 Public Square so we can begin the redevelopment of the building on 75 Public Square.

We are available to address any questions you may have in regards to this project.

Ken Bodah & Mike Pierce





