



TOWN OF WATERTOWN  
Department of  
Community Development and Planning  
PLANNING BOARD

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Board Members:  
Jeffrey W. Brown, Chairman  
Janet Buck  
Jason Cohen  
Payson R. Whitney, III

### PLANNING BOARD REPORT

This Report provides the Planning Board's recommendation to the Honorable Town Council for the Council's public hearing on a Zoning Text Amendment to Section 5.01 and 5.03 (notes), relating to the Central Business Zoning District.

<b>ZONING AMENDMENT:</b>	Article V, <i>Tables of District Regulations</i> , Amend Section 5.01 and 5.03 (notes), Central Business Zoning District
<b>DATE OF FIRST READING:</b>	January 19, 2021
<b>DATE OF PLANNING BOARD HEARING:</b>	March 10, 2021
<b>PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION:</b>	Adoption (4-0)

#### I. PUBLIC NOTICE

##### A. Procedural Summary

As required by the Watertown Zoning Ordinance § 9.22, notice of the Planning Board's March 10 hearing was given as follows:

- Published in the newspaper of record (Watertown Tab) on February 19 and 26, 2021
- Posted at the Town Administration Building on February 11, 2021

##### B. Planning Board Public Notice

###### " 1. Section 5.01 Table of Use Regulations

*Change the designation from "N" to "Y" under the column labeled "CB" in each of row 5.a.1, 5.b.1, 5.e.1, and 5.j.1; and from "N" to "N(17)" under the column labeled "CB" in each of row 5.a.2, 5.b.2, 5.e.2, and 5.j.2., to allow Light Industry, Non-nuisance Manufacturing, Laboratories/Research, and Renewable Research.*

###### 2. Section 5.03 Notes to Table of Use Regulations

*Insert after note 16 "(17) To further the preservation, continuing the adaptive reuse, and modernization of existing, meaningful older buildings in Watertown Square, conversion greater of 4,000 s.f. of building area is permitted subjected to Site Plan Review as provided in §9.03, if a structure existed before the adoption of the Zoning Ordinance on March 29, 1937."*

## **II. DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Background**

Applicant Berkeley Investments has acquired the Sasaki Associates, Inc. parcel (64 Pleasant Street) and is considering options for reusing the former Chase Mills complex with uses that would include a mix of office, lab, and small-scale manufacturing. The site consists of 2.6 acres in the Central Business (CB) Zoning District, which currently does not allow lab and related uses. The proponent consulted with Community Development and Planning staff and developed a Zoning Amendment that would allow such uses only in structures that existed prior to the 1937 adoption of the Watertown Zoning Ordinance. For structures up to 4,000 square feet, conversion would be by right, but if greater than 4,000 sf, conversion would require site plan review. This would apply throughout the Central Business (CB) Zoning District.

### **B. Nature of the Request**

The proposed Amendment changes Section 5.01 (Table of Use Regulations) to allow Light Industry, Non-nuisance Manufacturing, Laboratories/Research, and Renewable Research in the CB District and adds a note (17) to Section 5.03 to allow such uses in structures that existed prior to the 1937 adoption of the Watertown Zoning Ordinance, by right up to 4,000 square feet and with site plan review if greater than 4,000 sf. The proposed text is in the last section of this report.

## **III. STAFF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION**

The 2015 Comprehensive Plan and 2011 Strategic Framework for Economic Development contain goals and implementation recommendations that support the proposed zoning amendment. Although the Plan targets life sciences and advanced manufacturing as key industry clusters, this has not been previously allowed in the Central Business District as it has been seen as an area for Retail and some office uses. The proposed amendment has addressed this issue by limiting the locations where these uses are allowed to historic buildings. By doing this it will allow for the preservation of the character of some of these existing buildings through adaptive reuse, while not allowing for wholesale redevelopment of the Central Business District. Therefore, these plans do support the proposed amendment:

- Three Comprehensive Plan elements (land use, economic development, and historic and cultural resources) stress the importance of redevelopment of existing structures, particularly those that are vacant or underutilized, and have historic value. Similarly, the Economic Development Framework emphasizes the importance of redeveloping underutilized properties and notes the steep cost of rehabilitating historic structures. Recommendation 2C of the historic/cultural resources element suggests “zoning relief for projects that preserve historic resources.” The proposed zoning amendment appropriately differentiates between new developments and adaptive reuse of pre-1937 structures.
- The Plan’s land use and economic development elements discuss the importance of maintaining and strengthening the economic vitality of the Town’s corridors and squares. At the same time, its land use and transportation elements note the need for traffic and pedestrian/bike improvements in Watertown Square. The proposed amendment supports this balancing of interests in Watertown Square. With life sciences such a hot industry at present, proposed redevelopment will allow for

improved infrastructure on and around any proposed sites. However, laboratory uses have lower employee density than office uses so proposals are unlikely to add to traffic conditions in Watertown Square.

The proposed amendment allows lab, manufacturing, and related uses in smaller portions of existing pre-1937 buildings (up to 4,000 sf) by right. This is consistent with language in other zoning districts allowing a by right process for smaller spaces and allows a larger office or commercial building to have flexibility for the use of a portion for a demonstration or small test facility for a tenant. The Comprehensive Plan notes in the economic development element that flexible, right-sized spaces are desirable within the Town's key industry clusters.

The rationale for a more comprehensive approach for buildings built prior to the Zoning Ordinance was suggested by DCDP Staff to allow creative reuse of buildings within the district. This flexibility would clearly allow lab type uses but would also allow for other uses in the creative/maker economy that are often classified as light industrial/manufacturing in nature. A few examples identified during the Comprehensive Plan process include uses such as certain brewers, bakers, and ice cream manufacturing facilities with storefronts but also primarily intended to make products for offsite use.

Based on this, staff supported a recommendation by the Planning Board to the Town Council of approval of the requested change in zoning for the CB District.

#### **IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Seven people spoke during the public hearing. Curtis Whitney said he supported the proposed redevelopment of Chase Mills and conversion to lab/R&D uses, citing the quality of the developer and proposed adaptive reuse. However, Whitney said this could be accomplished with a smaller overlay district that would allow Watertown Square to focus on small businesses. Two other members of the public supported this view. Councilor Kounelis expressed concern about the number of lab/office buildings proposed throughout the Town and the possibility of market saturation, with the risk that these sites would have insufficient parking for other uses. Councilor Piccirilli strongly supported the proposed zoning amendment, stressing the importance of preserving the historic structures that are a key part of Watertown Square's urban fabric. James Miner, the Chief Executive Officer of Sasaki, said he had worked at 64 Pleasant Street for 24 years; he and others at the company feel great attachment to the complex. Sasaki saw the need to update the systems and couldn't afford to do that. When Sasaki put the property on the market, it had interested buyers who would demolish the structure and propose an office or housing use allowed in the CB District.

Councilor Donato and Piccirilli provided additional comments relating to a potential restriction on the geographic area of the amendment, suggesting that flexibility across the entire district was appropriate.

#### **V. PLANNING BOARD DELIBERATION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Board members asked a number of questions to clarify the proposed amendment. Member Buck inquired about the scope of proposed uses; Applicant said that the reference to "renewable" energy was part of the research category and not for on-site creation of renewable energy (other than roof solar arrays or equivalent). Staff said that the proposed uses could include possible storefront uses like brewers, bakers, maker and other creative economy spaces.

Chair Brown confirmed that the Applicant could convert the 64 Pleasant Street property with the present floor to ceiling heights. Member Cohen clarified the definition of adaptive reuse. Staff said there could be façade changes or other interior building alterations (as allowed through building permits), but that this proposed zoning amendment was about a change in use, not about the physical building, and that above 4,000 sf changes in use would be subject to site plan review.

Member Whitney asked how many other parcels would be eligible for the additional uses. Applicant said he recalls the number of buildings built since 1937 and over 4000 s.f. as around 13. Staff said it is hard to know the total number of eligible buildings without further study, because some of the older buildings may be too small to be appropriate for the additional uses and that any project would need to verify the age of construction.

Board members considered the option of creating a smaller overlay district or narrowing the geographic definition of the proposed amendment. Councilor Donato, as a member of the public, expressed concern that if the amendment limited the parcels that appropriate buildings might be unintentionally excluded. Member Cohen said he would not limit the geographic scope of the amendment. Councilor Piccirilli, as a member of the public, said he still supported the amendment as proposed. The Board voted 4-0 to recommend adoption of the zoning amendment.

#### **V. PROPOSED ZONING LANGUAGE:**

Following the Planning Board hearing, staff determined that the proposed language should be revised to clarify that the new uses would only be allowed in existing structures built prior to the Zoning Ordinance adoption of March 29, 1937, regardless of whether they are below or above 4,000 sf in area. The language, as revised, is consistent with the proposal as presented to the Board. Below is the language initially proposed and the language as revised.

#### **INITIAL LANGUAGE:**

##### **1. Section 5.01 Table of Use Regulations**

Change the designation from “N” to “Y” under the column labeled “CB” in each of row 5.a.1, 5.b.1, 5.e.1, and 5.j.1; and from “N” to “N(17)” under the column labeled “CB” in each of row 5.a.2, 5.b.2, 5.e.2, and 5.j.2., to allow Light Industry, Non-nuisance Manufacturing, Laboratories/Research, and Renewable Research.

##### **2. Section 5.03 Notes to Table of Use Regulations**

Insert after note 16:

(17) To further the preservation, continuing the adaptive reuse, and modernization of existing, meaningful older buildings in Watertown Square, conversion greater of 4,000 s.f. of building area is permitted subjected to Site Plan Review as provided in §9.03, if a structure existed before the adoption of the Zoning Ordinance on March 29, 1937.

#### **LANGUAGE AS REVISED:**

##### **1. Section 5.01 Table of Use Regulations**

Change the designation from “N” to “N(17)” under the column labeled “CB” in each of row 5.a.1, 5.b.1, 5.e.1, and 5.j.1; and from “N” to “N(17)” under the column labeled “CB” in each of

row 5.a.2, 5.b.2, 5.e.2, and 5.j.2., to allow Light Industry, Non-nuisance Manufacturing, Laboratories/Research, and Renewable Research.

**2. Section 5.03 Notes to Table of Use Regulations**

Insert after note 16:

(17) To further the preservation, continuing the adaptive reuse, and modernization of existing, meaningful older buildings in Watertown Square, **if a structure existed before the adoption of the Zoning Ordinance on March 29, 1937, conversion of a building or portion of a building area of less than 4,000 s.f. is allowed by right and** conversion greater of 4,000 s.f. of building area is permitted subjected to Site Plan Review as provided in §9.03.

Relevant excerpts from the Table of Use Regulations are redlined on the next page.

**As a Principal Use 5. Light Industry, Wholesale, Laboratory**

		NB	LB	CB	I-1	I-2	I-3	PSCD	ISC	RMUD
a.	Light Industry									
	1. All non-conversions; and, new construction and conversions up to 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	Y	Y	Y	SP	N	SP
	2. New construction or conversion greater than 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	N	SP/SR
b.	Non-nuisance manufacturing									
	1. All non-conversions; and, new construction and conversions up to 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	Y	Y	Y	SP	N	Y
	2. New construction or conversion greater than 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	N	SP/SR
c.	Office, including but not limited to administrative, executive, professional, and similar offices.									
	1. All non-conversions; and, new construction and conversions up to 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
	2. New construction or conversion greater than 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	N	SP/SR
d.	Public or bonded warehouse, parcel or goods distribution.	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
e.	Laboratories engaged in research, experimental and testing activities, including but not limited to the fields of biology, chemistry, electronics, engineering, geology, medicine, and physics.									
	1. All non-conversions; and, new construction and conversions up to 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
	2. New construction or conversion greater than 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	N	SP/SR
f.	Motor Vehicle Repair	N	N	N	SP	SP	SP	N	N	N
g.	Motor Vehicle Body Work	N	N	N	SP(4)	SP(4)	SP(4)	N	N	N
h.	Wholesale business, warehouse.	N	N	N	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	SP/SR	N	SP/SR
i.	Self-Service Storage Facility.	N	N	N	SP (9)	SP (9)	N	N	N	N
j.	Renewable or alternative energy research, development or manufacturing facility									
	1. All non-conversions; and, new construction and conversions up to 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
	2. New construction or conversion greater than 4,000 s.f. of building area	N	N	N (17)	SR	SR	SR	SR	N	SR
k.	Medical Marijuana Treatment Center (16)	N	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	N	SP
l.	Adult Use Marijuana Establishment (16)	N	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	N	SP
m.	Marijuana Testing Laboratories	N	N	N	SP	SP	SP	SP	N	SP

January 20, 2021

VIA EMAIL ONLY

Mark S. Sideris, President  
Town Council of Watertown  
149 Main Street  
Watertown, MA 02472  
Email: [msideris@watertown-ma.gov](mailto:msideris@watertown-ma.gov)

Re: Proposed Zoning Amendment for Central Business (CB) District

Dear Council President:

We are counsel to Berkeley Investments (“Berkeley”) and coordinating with Sasaki Associates, Inc., the owner of property located at 64 Pleasant Street (the “Property”). On behalf of the property owner, we are pleased to submit for the Council’s consideration the enclosed proposed zoning amendment for the CB District. Also enclosed are a Statement in Support of the zoning amendment and authorization from Sasaki for Berkeley to represent it regarding the zoning amendment.

As detailed in the Statement of Support, the zoning amendment will allow the adaptive reuse of historic buildings in the CB District and diversify employment opportunities in Watertown Square with reduced construction-period impacts. We look forward to working with the Town Council, Planning Board, Planning Staff and other boards, committees and interested parties on this exciting amendment.

We respectfully request the Town Council schedule this zoning amendment for the First Reading and referral to the Planning Board at its next available hearing date.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Christian Regnier



Attorney for Berkeley

Enclosures

cc: Steven Magoon, Director of Community Development & Planning  
Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner, Community Development & Planning

## STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED ZONING AMENDMENT

Historic buildings, such as those within the Chase Mills property in Watertown Square, are part of Watertown Square's fabric. However, the costs to upkeep these buildings and bring them up to modern accessibility, code, engineering and life safety standards, including to create a safe working environment within the context of the pandemic, are substantial and frequently infeasible. Often in the life cycle of these buildings, continued investment may not be economically justifiable. The zoning amendment detailed below seeks to encourage the continued reinvestment in and preservation of these historic buildings by enabling their adaptive reuse for lab/life science uses.

### **A. Proposed Zoning Amendment (the "Amendment")**

The Amendment would allow the conversion of existing, older buildings to lab/life sciences uses within the Central Business (CB) District, which encompasses much of Watertown Square, including the Chase Mills property located at 64 Pleasant Street. The uses allowed for such conversion would include:

- (i) "Laboratories engaged in research, experimental and testing activities, including but not limited to the fields of biology, chemistry, electronics, engineering, geology, medicine, and physics";
- (ii) "Light Industry";
- (iii) "Non-nuisance manufacturing"; and
- (iv) "Renewable or alternative energy research, development or manufacturing facility" (collectively, the "Lab and Related Uses").

Currently, none of the Lab and Related Uses are allowed within the CB District. The Amendment would allow (i) up to 4,000 sf of Lab and Related Uses as of right, and (ii) greater than 4,000 sf of conversion to Lab and Related Uses subject to site plan review within structures pre-existing the adoption of the Watertown Zoning Ordinance on March 29, 1937. The pre-existing structure qualification allows the Amendment to pertain to the CB District generally, while limiting applicability to buildings that are appropriate for and would benefit from preservation.

### **B. Adaptive Reuse Approach**

The Amendment aims to encourage continued reinvestment in historic buildings in and around Watertown Square, and as a result, increase and diversify employment opportunities within the CB District. Specifically, the Amendment supports the modernization of existing building space rather than demolition and new construction. This adaptive reuse approach to historic preservation results in cleaner, higher-efficiency, accessible buildings, without increasing density or materially increasing impacts. Such adaptive reuse is significantly less impactful and more sustainable when compared to new construction.

Moreover, the resulting upgraded space is intended to be re-tenanted with companies focusing on lab/life science uses, expanding the range of employment opportunities available in the CB District.

Lab/life science businesses themselves are diverse in size, from start-ups with seed funding to maturing research and development firms introducing therapies, as well as in employee makeup, with job opportunities for lab technicians, accountants, PhDs, marketing specialists and more. The Amendment will support downtown economic growth and vitality by creating opportunities for early stage life science and biotech businesses to establish themselves in and near Watertown Square.

### **C. Consistency with Watertown Planning**

The Amendment is consistent with the Strategic Framework for Economic Development (the “Framework”), which identifies life sciences as “an opportunity for further [economic] growth in Watertown.” For example, the Framework recognizes that “as [life science] firms have grown and moved from research to product development to production and distribution, some have moved to surrounding suburbs [outside of Boston and Cambridge] ... in search of larger and lower-cost facilities.” The Framework further recognizes that Watertown already hosts “a number of smaller firms conducting pharmaceutical research.” The cost efficiency of adaptive reuse that avoids new construction can unlock competitive rents that attract expanding firms and retain smaller firms.

The Amendment also is consistent with Comprehensive Plan, which shows Watertown Square as a Commercial Mixed Use Area intended “to be enhanced ... with mixed land uses where commercial development is the primary use, including light industrial [and] research and development” uses. Importantly, Watertown Square is identified as one of Watertown’s “Established Commercial Squares.” The Amendment aims to continue the commercial vitality of this location, expanding and stabilizing the potential employment base of the CB District with a vital industry.

### **D. Conclusion**

The proposed zoning amendment allows the enhancement of historic buildings within the CB District. Introducing life science businesses enables diversification of employment opportunities that can further activate Watertown Square and support local retail and restaurants. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings delivers modernized facilities with reduced construction-period impacts.

## **PROPOSED ZONING AMENDMENT**

Pursuant to the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, Section 5 and the Town of Watertown Zoning Ordinance Sections 9.20 and 9.21 the undersigned owners of land to be affected by this submission, hereby submit to the Honorable Town Council of the Town of Watertown the following proposed Zoning Amendment:

That the Town Council amend the Watertown Zoning Ordinance as follows:

### **Section 5.01 Table of Use Regulations**

Change the designation from “N” to “Y” under the column labeled “CB” in each of row 5.a.1, 5.b.1, 5.e.1, and 5.j.1.

Change the designation from “N” to “N(17)” under the column labeled “CB” in each of row 5.a.2, 5.b.2, 5.e.2, and 5.j.2.

### **Section 5.03 Notes to Table of Use Regulations**

Insert after note 16 “(17) To further the preservation, continuing adaptive reuse, and modernization of existing, meaningful older buildings in Watertown Square, conversion greater than 4,000 s.f. of building area is permitted subject to Site Plan Review as provided in §9.03, if a structure existed before the adoption of the Zoning Ordinance on March 29, 1937.”

Or to take any other action relative thereto.

The Parcel ID number of the affected parcel is #202 1E 0 64 Pleasant Street.

Respectfully submitted on this 20th day of January, 2021.

By:   
Sasaki Associates, Inc., and its successors-in-interest  
Parcel ID #202 1E 0  
64 Pleasant Street

The undersigned, owner of 64 Pleasant Street (Parcel ID #202 1E 0) hereby authorizes Berkeley Investments, Inc., to represent it for purposes of the proposed zoning amendment affecting the property.

By:   
Sasaki Associates, Inc.  
Parcel ID #202 1E 0  
64 Pleasant Street