

**BOROUGH OF SOUTH PLAINFIELD
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES**

March 11, 2025

Present:

Bob Ackerman; Chairman
Joe Abbruzzese
Gerry Butrico
Brian Bythell
Maria Campagna, Alt 1
Richard Houghton, Vice Chairman
Suzanne Lepore
John Mocharski
Peter Smith, Councilman

Absent:

Mayor Matthew Anesh
Roberto Sayers, Alt 2

Also Present: Matt Flynn, Esq., Andrew Denbigh, PE, CME, CFM, Timothy Jenssen, AICP

Chairman Ackerman opened the meeting at 7:00 pm stating that this meeting is being held in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, by posting a notice to The Courier News and The South Plainfield Observer and providing the same to the Borough Clerk.

It is the policy of the Borough of South Plainfield's Planning Board not to hear any new cases after 10:00pm and no new witnesses after 10:30 pm.

Minutes: None.

Resolutions: None.

Current Files: None.

Informal Hearings: None.

Hearings: Public Hearings

Chairman Ackerman calls up case number 827, Todree Realty Co., Block 65, Lot 6, OBC 1, Zone, 2109 Park Avenue. The applicant requests preliminary and final site plan approval for parking lot modifications.

Jason Cherchia, Esq. Attorney for the Applicant

- Jason Cherchia represents Todree Realty.
- The property is located at 2109 Park Avenue, Block 65, Lot 6, in the OBC 1 zone.
- Seeking preliminary and final amended major site plan approval to pave the front of the lot for additional parking. Currently, there are six parking spaces utilizing an easement on Lot 5.
- Proposal: Add three angle parking spaces, including a handicap space.
- Requires three variances: off-street parking, minimum drive aisle width, and assigned setbacks. Also requires a design waiver to allow paved area near property line.

Todd Luna Testimony

- Todd Luna, president of Todree Realty, and his sister, Terry Luna, are co-owners of the property since 1972.
- The building was designed by Herb Verse for Sherwin Williams, with a floor plan and basement.
- In 2020 asbestos was found in the building.
- An offer to remediate the asbestos in exchange for a lease extension was declined due to pandemic-related sales decline.
- The current store manager, improved the store's performance, meeting the budget in 2024 for the first time since 2018.
- There are four employees, but the dumpster takes up one of the six spaces, leaving only five spaces.
- Three employees require parking, leaving only two spaces for customers.
- The lack of parking may deter customers.

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Lease Renewal and Improvements

- Todd Luna offered to take care of the asbestos and go before the planning board to get more parking in order to renew the lease.
- The plan is to remodel the store to utilize the basement for greater inventory, potentially increasing the store's success and ensuring its long-term presence in South Plainfield.

Business Operations

- The store is open about 70 hours a week, from 7 am to 10 pm Monday through Friday, with slightly reduced hours on weekends and the least hours on Sundays.
- The store has a manager, an assistant manager, and two employees.
- Most of their business is in the spring, summer, and fall due to the nature of painting.
- The regional manager also identified parking as a problem for the store.

Customer Base and Competition

- Sherwin Williams' primary customers are contractors, who receive better pricing than the general public.
- There used to be a Benjamin Morse store on South Avenue and on Scotch Plains that has since closed.

Signage Variance

- A variance is required because a sign is not far enough away from the property line.
- The applicant is willing to remove the sign and not erect a new one.
- The existing sign may not have had a permit. The ground sign is being removed, leaving only the sign on the building.

Testimony of A.J. Garrido, Engineer for the Applicant

- A.J. Garrido, a licensed professional engineer in New Jersey and Principal Engineer with Two River Engineering, is introduced.
- He has testified before numerous boards throughout New Jersey.
- Two exhibits are presented:
 - A1: A colored rendering of sheet three of eight from the quality rating utility plans.
 - A2: Six colored mounted photos of the property and surrounding area taken from Google Earth.
- The first photo shows the property from the front yard.
 - To the left is a residential house.
 - To the right is another property on the same side of the street.
- The bottom three photos show businesses across the street.
- There are currently six parking spaces located to the rear of the property, based on an easement.
 - The client wants to add more parking.
 - Proposed are three parking spots, including one handicap accessible spot with a 12-foot-wide driveway.
 - There's an existing curb cut on Park Avenue, so no new curb cut, or sidewalk reconstruction is needed.
- The property is 7,500 square feet, which is undersized for the zone.
- Current zoning regulations require 15 spaces.
 - There are currently six spaces, but one is difficult to access due to a dumpster.
 - The plan is to add three more spaces.
- A variance is required for the drive aisle width, which is proposed at 12 feet.
 - 18 or 20 feet is required for 75-foot angle parking, but there isn't enough space.
 - The drive aisle can still operate safely with passenger cars.
- A pole-mounted LED light fixture is planned for the front of the property.
- The existing sign is on the northerly section of the property.
 - The plan is to move it back closer to the building or remove it if the client agrees.
- Andrew, the engineer, is in receipt of a letter dated November 1, 2024.
- The northern apron on Park Avenue is a shared apron with the adjacent property owner.
 - Concern about a hard divider potentially obstructing access between the properties.
 - Proposing asphalt without a curb, but a curb could be added if needed.

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- Turning templates were run to ensure cars can pull in and out.
 - It's not ideal, but it can be done.
 - Backing out of the most northerly parking lot may cross the property line.
- The northerly apron is asphalt, not concrete as indicated on the plans.
 - The southerly apron is also in disrepair.
 - Willing to replace both aprons as a condition of approval.
- The current parking spaces are not delineated on site but can be striped.

Fencing and Signage

- The fence along the rear is a PVC vinyl fence belonging to the residence behind the property.
- No fencing is proposed directly adjacent to the parking area.
- Originally, there was a proposal to relocate the freestanding monument sign, but now the plan is to remove it entirely and keep the existing facade sign.

Refuse and Recycling

- Garbage collection will remain in the same location, with no proposed changes.
- The changes are limited to the front: three parking spots, lighting, landscaping, a handicap spot, and removal of the existing sign.

Parking and Sidewalk Safety

- Bollards will be installed to protect the building.
- The parking spots are angled at 75 degrees, head-on.
- There is concern that cars backing out of the northernmost spot might cross the sidewalk, posing a risk to pedestrians.
- Suggestion to add signage, striping, or a raised texture to alert pedestrians of cars crossing the sidewalk.
- A one-way sign and a stop sign with a crosswalk are being considered for safety.

Deliveries and Parking Configuration

- An 18-wheeler makes deliveries once a week, potentially blocking the exit temporarily.
- There is a suggestion to consider only two 90-degree parking spaces (including a handicap space) instead of three angled spaces for safety.
- The applicant wants to get at least two spaces out of this for contractors.

Parking Easement

- The original parking easement was discussed.
- There was a question if the original parking easement was for seven spaces, but the applicant stated it was always for six.
- There is not enough room to add a seventh space.

Parking Issues and Solutions

- The dumpster reduces the available spaces from six to five.
- Concerning people parking along the side, blocking access, especially near the easements.
 - Landscaping was done in 2018, but people still park there.
 - Suggestion to add signage like "no parking in the aisle" to maintain circulation.
 - A fire lane could also help prevent parking in the wrong areas.

Employee Parking

- Suggestion to designate the two front spots as employee parking due to the tight turning radius.
 - The manager could encourage employees to park in those spots.
 - One member stated that they would not park in the front as a contractor.
- Agreement to designate one of the front spots (the toughest one to get in and out of) as employee parking with a sign.
 - Enforcement may be difficult, but it's an effort to improve the situation.

Lighting Plan

- The lighting plan includes one pole-mounted LED light in the grass area between the sidewalk and the pavement.
- There are no existing building lights, but light from the store windows provides some illumination.
- The LED light is designed to prevent spillover onto neighboring properties.
- The light pole will be placed in the grass area between the sidewalk and the pavement, not in the parking lot itself.

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Lighting

- A light pole will be installed to light the parking lot.
- The pole is in the scratch strip and overhangs to illuminate the area.
- A light on the side of the building could illuminate sparkly spots.
- A full lighting plan for the existing and new parking lot will be provided.

Public Hearing and Summation

- The public portion is opened for comments or questions. Seeing none the public portion is closed.
- The building was constructed in 1972, and the property's needs have evolved.
- The parking is not compliant with the current ordinance, but they are trying to become closer to compliant.
- They will comply with all conditions discussed and provide turning templates.

Conditions and Variances

- They are looking for preliminary and final site plan approval.
- They need variances for the number of off-street parking spaces (9 proposed, 12 required) and minimum drive aisle width (12ft proposed, 22ft required).
- A design waiver is needed for parking within 5ft of a property line.
- Conditions include eliminating the sign, working on safe circulation, providing turning templates, replacing damaged driveway aprons, striping the sidewalk as a crosswalk, installing a one-way sign, and adding a building-mounted light fixture.

Motion and Approval

- A motion is made to grant preliminary and final approval with the noted conditions.
- Mr. Mocharski made motion, seconded by Ms. Campagna
- The application is unanimously approved.

Chairman Ackerman calls Case number 828 Block 65, Lot 8, OBC 1, Zone 2064 Holly Avenue. The applicant is requesting a minor subdivision approval to create two lots.

Introduction of Witnesses

- Jim Stahl introduces Mr. Bakshi (engineer), Mr. Fernandez (architect), and Mr. Graviano (professional planner).
- Changes to the application will be highlighted during testimony because of the planning and engineering report.
- Mr. Bakshi will discuss existing conditions, proposed development, impervious surfaces, and density.
- Mr. Hernandez will discuss architectural aspects and changes to elevations and the floor plan.
- Mr. Graviano will testify regarding the proof necessary for the bulk variances on the site and how they have changed since certain revisions to the plans.
- The applicant intends to live in the new house and either keep the old house for family or sell the existing dwelling.

Testimony of Joseph Bachi

- Joseph Bachi is sworn in. Joseph Bachi, B-A-C-H-I, EKA Associates, Principal Engineer since 2017, licensed in New Jersey. He appeared before planning and zoning boards throughout the state of New Jersey.
- Mr. Flynn submits Mr. Bachi as an expert in engineering.

Questions for Mr. Bachi

- Mr. Stahl outlines four key areas for Mr. Bachi to address:
 - What exists on the site today.
 - What is proposed for the site.
 - List the variances being requested.
 - Confirm that all planning and engineering comments have been addressed.

Existing Conditions

- Mr. Bachi refers to the cover sheet of the submitted plans, dated August 26, 2024.
- The site is located on the west side of Holly Avenue in the OBC1 zone.

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- The site is surrounded by single-family residential properties to the north, east, and south, and commercial properties to the west, fronting Park Avenue.
- The lot is rectangular, with 150ft frontage on Holly Avenue and a 100ft depth, totaling 15,000 square feet.
- The site is relatively flat, with a slight grade towards the northeast.
- Existing improvements include a one-story frame dwelling, a large driveway, a deck, a patio, and a shed in the rear.
- There is an existing non-conformity: the southern side yard is 7.92ft versus the required 8ft. This will not be changed.

Existing Non-conformity

- A very slight existing non-conformity of 0.08ft.
- It really covers the site.

Minor Subdivision Plan

- Dated August 25, 2023.
- The plan is to split the lot in half into two conforming lots.
 - Both lots will have a frontage of 75ft and a depth of 100ft.
- The existing home garage goes over the proposed lot line and is proposed to be removed.

Proposed Conditions and Changes

- The team reviewed the engineering and planning letters and discussed changes to address concerns.
- Addressing comments related to the northern property (proposed lot 8.01):
 - Extending the curb and sidewalk across the lot within the right of way.
 - Flipping the house to address concerns about the curved driveway and existing inlet on Holly Ave.
 - "Flipping it correct. As if one side was on a hinge and we're just going to flip it over so it's a mirror of what it used to be."
 - The driveway would be on the northern side, coming straight out at 18ft wide.
 - Changing the deck to a patio and reducing the house size by about 2ft to comply with the rear yard setback requirement.
 - This eliminates the variance for Lot 8.01.
- Proposing permeable pavers for the patio and driveway to offset impervious coverage, although not required by ordinance.

Lot Coverage and Variances

- For proposed lot 8.01, a variance is sought for lot coverage.
 - Trimming the house and converting the deck to a patio would reduce lot coverage from 32.54% to 27.83%.
- For lot 8.02:
 - The garage will be removed, but the rest of the house will remain in a similar footprint (about 16,000-17,000 square feet).
 - The wide driveway (43-44ft) will be replaced with an 18ft wide driveway.
 - Lot coverage for 8.02 is 26.96%.
- A stormwater management report was submitted, showing reductions for the 2 and 10-year storms and meeting existing levels for the 100-year storm.
 - This is achieved by collecting water from the houses and directing it to dry wells on each property.

Drainage

- An inlet is proposed at the rear of lot 8.01 to collect water and pipe it into the inlet on Holly Avenue.
- Roof leaders will be piped into dry wells on lots 8.01 and 8.02.

Drainage

- The goal is to prevent water from pooling or draining back.
- An inlet was placed in the back due to the flat terrain.

Parking

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- The new house will have a two-car garage with space for two additional cars in the driveway, accommodating four cars in total.
- The driveway from the property line to the house is about 40ft.
- The driveway size is a common driveway size.
- There are two separate driveways for two separate properties.

House Dimensions

- The footprint of the new house is a little over 1900 square feet after changes.
- The footprint is 1919 square feet after changes.

Fire Official Question

- A question was raised regarding the variance of 8.92ft on 8.01 and its potential impact on fire department access.
- The fire official stated that they should be able to get through with no problem.

Testimony of Roberto A. Hernandez

- Roberto A. Hernandez is a self-employed principal architect at Robert A. Hernandez Architect, with over 12 years of experience.
- He is a licensed New Jersey architect.
- Credentials are accepted by the board.

Finished Floor Elevation and House Dimensions

- The proposed house is 44 feet wide and 49 feet deep on the garage side.
- The garage comes out 10ft with respect to the front foyer wall and it bumps out two feet with respect to the covered porch.
- The garage and covered porch are being reduced by 2ft.

Footprint Commitment

- The applicant has not selected formal plans for the house.
- The footprint cannot change without further variances.
- The applicant is committing to the "box" on the subdivision plan.

Board Discussion

- Technically, a minor subdivision application doesn't require showing the actual house design.
- The applicant has eliminated the need for a rear yard setback variance for the new home. Plans will be submitted for review, and any further deviations will require the applicant to return to the board.
- The proposed house is a 3,600 square foot, two-story home with an attached 433 square foot two-car garage.
- The proposed home has four bedrooms on the second floor and a total of four bathrooms, with one on the first floor and three on the second floor.
- There is an unfinished basement and attic.
- The new building is approximately 44 feet wide by 49 feet deep.
 - The 49-foot depth includes a 10-foot garage bump-out and a 2-foot covered porch bump-out.
- The plan is to mirror the house, shaving off 2 feet from the garage and 2 feet from the covered porch.
- The first floor has an open concept with a foyer, living room, dining room, kitchen, breakfast room, and family room, as well as a work-from-home office and a full bathroom.
- The second floor has four bedrooms, three bathrooms, and a laundry room.
- The applicant agrees not to create additional bedrooms in the basement or attic to avoid needing a parking deviation.

Discussion on Mirroring the House

- The board clarifies that the mirroring refers to the driveway placement, not a complete mirror of the existing house.
- The new house on lot 8.01 will have a flipped-floor plan compared to the plans, with the garage on the opposite side.
- The existing house on lot 8.02 has a three-car garage that will be eliminated.

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- The driveway of the new house will accommodate two cars, and the garage will accommodate two cars.
- The existing house's driveway will accommodate four cars (two by two).

Testimony of Nicholas Graviano

- Nicholas Graviano, a planner, partner, and designer with Graviano & Gillis Architects & Planners, LLC
- Licensed professional planner in New Jersey since 2003 and holds an AICP certification.
- He has appeared before zoning and planning boards in numerous municipalities.
- Graviano was requested to report on the burden of proof regarding bulk variances for the project.
- The applicant seeks minor subdivision approval with associated C variances for Block 65, Lot 8, to create two conforming lots of 7,500 square feet each.
- The subject parcel is a 15,000 square foot parcel located in the OBC1 zoning district.
- The applicant is requesting relief after plan modifications based on reviews by the board engineer and planner.

Variances for Existing Dwelling

- Two variances related to the existing dwelling to remain:
 - Minimum side yard setback: 7.92ft (existing and proposed, not created by application).
 - Rear yard setback variance: 16.67ft to the existing deck (31.5ft to the main house, which conforms).

Variances for Proposed Lot

- Rear yard setback variance for proposed lot 8.01 (new dwelling): Applicant agrees to meet the district requirement with the revised dwelling.
- Lot coverage variances required for both existing and proposed dwellings.
 - Proposed Lot 8.01: Requesting 27.83% lot coverage (previously 32.54%).
 - Applicant is mitigating coverage by providing a pervious paver patio and driveway.
 - Existing dwelling (Lot 8.02): Requesting 26.96% lot coverage (25% required by code).

Criteria for Granting Variances

- Setback variances on proposed lot 8.02 could be granted under C1 and C2 criteria.
 - C1: Strict application of zoning ordinance would create undue hardship.
 - C2: Hardship need not be demonstrated but must relate to a specific piece of property and advance the purposes of the municipal land use law.
- Proposal advances:
 - Purpose A: Promotion of general health, morals, safety, and welfare (through permeable pavers).
 - Purpose G: Sufficient space for residential uses.
 - Purpose I: Promotion of a desirable visual environment (removal of large driveway and garages).
- Applicant's relief is modest and can be granted without substantial impairment to the zone plan or zoning ordinance.

Question Regarding Previous Approval

- Question about previous approval for the current house regarding a business being run out of the home.

Testimony of Ali Seferolu

- Ali Seferolu is the owner of the house and has owned it since 1992.
- Previously, they received a variance to run an office in the house for an office cleaning business here they would dispatch employees out of the office.
- Used to store equipment in the garage.

Intentions for New House

- Intent is to move the office to the new house and will no longer needs storage in the garage. Agrees not to store business-related items in the basement if required.
- Wants to continue running the office from home.

Discussion on Variance

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- The variance runs with the land, so it's just moving the office variance next door.
- It should be stipulated as a condition of approval that any activity related to the business is a home office and not storage of equipment.
- Committing on record that it will remain a home office for paperwork, billing, and phone calls only, with no storage of materials or appliances.
- Previous approval included storage of supplies, chemicals, and paper goods, but that is not transferring to the new home, just the home office.
- There are no commercial vehicles on the property.

Other Improvements

- There will be no housing in the basement or in the third floor attic, which will be used for residential storage.
- The applicant will extend the curb and sidewalk along the front of Holly Avenue, including paving the section of the roadway in front of the improvements on LAD1 that is in disrepair.
- The driveway for the new dwelling will be pervious, while the existing dwelling will have an asphalt driveway.
- An operations and maintenance manual will be prepared and deed-restricted recorded with the county for the pervious driveway.

Landscaping and Dimensions

- There is no landscaping proposed for the site, but typical foundation plantings and small shrubs are planned.
- The applicant will plant at least one deciduous shade tree for every 40ft of frontage, totaling four shade trees.
- The dimensions from the right of way line to the edge of the existing house is 40ft.
- The applicant stated that they comply with all the comments from the March 11th letter.

Fencing and Variances

- The existing fencing in the rear and side yards will remain.
- The only reason for the variance on the new property is because of the deck. The relief is on the old dwelling
- The new house originally proposed a deck which created a variance condition, but that has been eliminated.

Public Comment

- An adjoining property owner, was sworn in. Mr. Little expresses his concern about the lot coverage.
- Little is concerned that the house is residential, but OBC1 is residential and could be commercial.
- Little says, "If granted, you're going to be giving a subdivision. Expresses he likes what was testified to tonight and the exhibits, but feels the home is a little large.

Square Footage and Development Options

- The applicant agrees as a condition of approval that the undeveloped proposed subdivided lot will only be used for a single-family home.
- The "box" (dimensions) of the house cannot be increased without approval.
- The house will remain residential, non-commercial, with the ability to have a home office.
- There will be no application to convert the house to anything other than a single-family residence.

House Mirroring and Lot Coverage

- The house was mirrored/flipped due to a conflict between the driveway and an inlet.
- The lot meets the 75 by 100 requirement for an approved lot.
- There is no variance for the square footage of the house, but there is a coverage variance.
- The applicant has provided permeable pavers in the driveway and patio.

Subdivision and Construction Details

- The plans presented by the architect are not necessarily what will be built.
- If the house goes bigger, the applicant will have to come before the board for approval.
- The curbing and sidewalks will run from the existing home to the new home.
- The lot coverage was originally proposed at 32.5 but has been reduced to 27.83.

Concerns and Assurances

- A neighbor expressed concern about overbuilding in the area.

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- The applicant wants to build the house according to the architect's plans and live there.
- If approved, it will only be a single-family residence, and no one can live in the basement or attic.

Conditions for Approval

- Minor subdivision to turn one lot into two lots.
- Existing home to remain, with new construction on the newly created lot.
- Driveway will be flipped to avoid interference with the existing drainage inlet.
- The deck will be turned into a patio.
- Permeable pavers for the driveway and rear patio.
- Restricted to single family residential use via deed restriction.
- Footprint consistent with plans presented.
- Attic and basement cannot be converted to additional living space.
- On-site use limited to home office in the newly constructed home.
- Shade trees, pavement, curbing, and sidewalk through the entire frontage.
- Compliance work needed: O&M manual for pervious infrastructure, deed restrictions, and subdivision deed.
- The proposed permeable paver driveway will be deed restricted.
- The application only requires two new variances for lot coverage on each lot.
- The existing home has non-conformities related to rear yard and side yard that are not being touched.

Motion and Vote

- Chairman Ackerman call for a motion to approve the application. Mr. Mocharski made motion, seconded by Ms. Lepore.
- The Board unanimously approved the application.

Chairman Ackerman calls a five-minute recess at 9:08PM

Chairman Ackerman calls the meeting back to order at 9:14PM. Joe Abbruzzese abstains from the application and leaves the meeting. All remaining Board members which were present for the roll call at the start of the meeting are present.

Chairman Ackerman calls Planning Bard case number 821 Durham Plaza LLC, Block 541, Lot 10.02, OPA 1 zone. Applicant request preliminary and final major site plan approval for a four-story, 95-unit multi-family residential community.

Derek Orth, Esq. representing Durham Plaza from the firm Inglesino Taylor, Attorneys at Law.

- Representing Durham Plaza LLC, seeking approval for a 95-unit community with a 20% affordable housing set-aside.
- Project includes off-street parking, garage spaces, landscaping, utilities, stormwater management, and community amenities.
- Seeking two bulk variances for monument sign setbacks:
 - 15-foot setback required.
 - Durham: 1.41 feet proposed.
 - Main: 6.85 feet proposed.
- Seeking two design waivers:
 - Paved area for parking lot distance to building (standard is 5 feet, proposed is 4.2-4.5 feet in curved portions).
 - Minimum driveway aisle width for two-way drive aisles connecting to 90-degree parking stalls (standard is 25 feet, proposed is 24 feet).
- Application stems from a Mount Laurel settlement agreement executed in 2022.
- Three witnesses: Dave Stiers (engineer/planner), Nick Kenny (traffic consultant), and John Sirocco (architect).

Witness Testimony - David Stiers (Engineer/Planner)

- Sworn in and provides professional qualifications.

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- Graduated from Lehigh University in 1985 with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering. Secured engineering and planning licenses in 1990.
- Has almost 40 years of experience as a professional engineer and planner.
- Testified before the Board of Adjustment last month in South Plainfield.
- A colored rendering of the plans is presented, marked as exhibit A-1.

Existing Conditions

- Durham Avenue is to the east, Main Street to the west, and Hamilton Boulevard at the top left corner.
- Valley National Bank is to the north, apartments to the west, and an auto shop within the property.
- The property is 6.3 acres and contains an L-shaped commercial retail strip mall (Durham Plaza) with parking.
- Access points on Durham include a write-in and write-out, and an access point on Main Street.
- The existing strip is 24,300 square feet with adequate parking and a service road.
- There are about 40-50% vacancies, and the strip mall is about 20 years old.
- A large underground storm system with 42-inch pipes (325 feet long) is located east of the proposed U-shaped building.

Existing Building

- Sewered by an existing pump system that runs out Main street and down Hamilton to the existing gravity system.
- Public water and gas.
- Wetlands along the southern border next to Texas Avenue.

Proposed Building

- A U-shaped four-story apartment building containing 95 units including the 19 inclusionary units.
- The first level of the building is proposed as a garage.
 - Access points will be on the east side of the two ends of the U.
 - Circulation through the garage.
 - 79 parking spaces are located within that building.
- The overall footprint is 38,111 square feet.
- Height is 52ft 4 inches.
- Upgrades based on requests by the board engineer: new signage, new curving proposing a sidewalk along Durham Avenue with ADA depressed curbs at the driveway openings.

Parking

- 79 spaces within the garage.
- 94 spaces on the north side of the proposed building.
- Large drop-off area located next to the two main entrances into the building itself.
- Six ADA spaces proposed.
 - Four in the garage.
 - Two outside of the garage.
- 12 EV charging stations proposed where 10 are required.

Design Waivers Requested

- Driveway width: 24ft is proposed where 25ft is required.
 - Request based on a de minimis differential.
- Parking along the northern property line: 4.2ft setback proposed where 5ft is required.
 - The existing parking lot in the center of the northern property line is also that same setback.

Signage

- Two monument signs proposed that are 20 square feet each.
- Removing existing large pylon sign (approximately 20ft in height and 200 square feet).
- The one on Durham is 1.41ft from the property line, the one on Main Street is 6.85ft.
- Request to allow signs to be visible to the tenants and their visitors rather than be set back behind the fencing.

Stormwater

- Eight 42-inch diameter pipes that are 325ft in length located in the existing parking lot.

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- Will protect during construction and reuse them.
- Had them cleaned out.
- Still owe a report for an inspection by the borough.
- The overall proposal calls for a reduction in an impervious coverage of 18,556 square feet.
 - Impervious coverage on the site is going from 61.68% to 56.3%.
- Regulated motor vehicle surface area is being reduced by 32,078 square feet.

Water Quality

- Water quality improvements are not required by the state.
- The proposed system includes a biofilter system, which is not technically required based on DEP guidelines, but is offered to clean motor vehicle surface coverage.
- They are doing what they can but not picking up a lot of the blacktop area due to existing storm system and piping conflicts.
- Andrew (Planning Board Engineer) has raised some comments with the stormwater, and they will work with his office to resolve them.

Sewer

- Proposing a new force main next to the Main Street right-of-way.
- Hoping to tie into the existing force main that runs up to the borough manhole.
- Working with Dan Madden of JMT and Len Miller from the Borough Sewer Utility.
 - Miller has certain conditions, such as upgrading the manhole and requiring a licensed operator.
 - He also wants a maintenance agreement in the borough right-of-way to be included in the developer's agreement, requiring coordination with the Board Attorneys office.

Water

- Water currently comes into a meter in the northeast corner of the property and ties into the existing building.
- Working with New Jersey American Water and Middlesex Water to provide water and fire service.
- The owner's representative met with Chief Jason Campbell, who approved the connection.
- Proposing to move the existing hydrant at the driveway entrance with Main Street slightly due to the driveway reconfiguration.

Gas

- Checking if the existing gas service from Texas Avenue has the capacity for apartment building.
- If not, they will relocate the gas connection to avoid filing for wetland permits, shifting it closer to the main entrance.

Site Lighting

- Proposing 20-foot-high LED freestanding lights and 15-foot LED wall packs along the northern property line and building phase.
- The board consultant commented on spillage along the bank, for which they may request a waiver or provide back shields.
- High light levels at garage entrances were intentionally upgraded for safety due to parking spaces on either side of the driveway.

Landscaping

- A professional landscape architect designed the street trees and shrubbery.
- They believe it meets the ordinance requirements.
- They will provide additional clarity on the trees, as requested by the board consultants.

Amenities

- Pathway and gazebo out front with fencing along the perimeter.
- Pergola and grilling area off the second level, accessible through the apartment building.
- Pickleball court in the southeast corner with fencing and sidewalk access.
- Generator for emergency services to operate elevators and charging stations during outages.
- Internal trash chutes on each side of the U-shape in the hallway.
- Gym and game room inside.
- Bicycle racks inside the garage on either side of the U.

Wetlands and Buffer Zone

- There is a wetland corridor with a buffer that comes close to the building's grading.

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- There is not much room to create space for a play area due to the buffer.

Bioretention Area and Play Area

- The bioretention area is not required based on state regulations and could be removed to create a playground or area for children.

Trash and Recycling

- Trash chutes are in two general locations inside the building.
- Garbage trucks pull into the driveway entrances, and garbage is wheeled out.
- Recycling has multiple drop-off locations.

Children's Play Area and Bus Stop

- Consider creating a children's play area on the property.
- A bus stop should be located on the property.
- A covered area could be incorporated near one of the doors for children waiting for the bus.

Durham Avenue Entrance

- Concerns about the width of the Durham Avenue entrance and the potential for left-hand turns.
- One person would prefer the right side of the entrance to be wider than the left.
- There are concerns about traffic backing up due to people making left turns into the property.

Traffic Concerns and Mitigation

- Narrowing the driveway aisles to make left turns less attractive.
- Closing off access, allowing access only for emergency vehicles using measures like pavers and press curves.
- Fire truck access to the back of the building is a concern, especially with the pergola and grills planned.
- Accidents frequently occur at the site and at the light.

Legalities and Traffic Impact

- Making illegal turns harder and easier to prove guilt.
- The shopping center generates more trips than residential areas.
- There hasn't been much traffic to the site in years, but the new development will increase traffic.

Fire Safety and Hydrants

- Concerns about fire truck access to the back of the buildings, especially with wetlands nearby.
- Turning radii for fire trucks and hydrant placement are important considerations.
- Hydrant should be on the same side of the street as the building to avoid blocking traffic with hoses.

Parking

- There are 79 parking spaces for 95 units, raising concerns about parking availability for residents.
- Testimony about parking will be provided by the architect.

Traffic Consultant Testimony

- Nicholas Kennedy from Stone Engineering Design.
- Licensed professional engineer with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering.
- Prepared over 250 traffic studies and qualified by over a dozen boards.
- Prepared a traffic assessment report dated February 21, 2024.

Site Description and Proposed Development

- The site is located on Durham Avenue southbound, between Hamilton Boulevard and I-287.
- The area has a complex traffic pattern due to the proximity of Hamilton Boulevard, Durham Avenue, Hadley Road, and Stelton Road, and I-287.
- The site currently has a 25,000 square foot retail commercial strip mall with access via a right-in, right-out driveway on Durham Avenue and another driveway on Main Street.
- The proposed development includes 95 residential units with ground floor and surface parking, with access remaining as is (with potential tweaks).

Traffic Engineering Analysis

- Traffic engineers analyze the traffic and trip generation of the site, as well as on-site circulation, parking, and loading.

Traffic and Trip Generation

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- Mr. Kennedy visited the site and noted that only two or three tenants are currently active, with the larger corner and left side of the building vacant.
- Trip generation numbers are based on the assumption that the building is fully occupied.
- A fully occupied retail development would generate significantly more traffic than the proposed 95 residential units.
- Residential developments typically have fixed traffic patterns (morning and evening peaks), while retail developments have more spread-out traffic throughout the day.

ITE and DOT Thresholds

- Mr. Kennedy mentions the ITE threshold for conducting traffic studies is 50 new trips at any one intersection.
 - The proposed development would only generate 48 trips in the highest peak hour, which is below the threshold.
- The DOT threshold is 100 trips at any one intersection in one peak hour.
 - The maximum for the 95-unit development would be 48 trips, also below the threshold.
- The Boroughs engineer agreed that a fully occupied development would have a higher trip generation and that additional analyses would not be necessary.

Board Member's Concerns

- A board member questions the claim of only 48 trips in one hour for 95 units, arguing that two cars per unit would result in 190 cars.
- The board member expresses concern about increased traffic during rush hour, especially with existing and proposed developments in the area.
- The board member believes the traffic engineer is relying on outdated manuals and not considering the reality of car ownership today.

Response and Rebuttal

- The traffic engineer states that the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) conducts hundreds of studies.
- Two cars per unit in an apartment in New Jersey is not the going rate anymore and is more like 1.6.
- The applicant's attorney requests an opportunity to present more data and studies to address the board's concerns.
- The attorney acknowledges the board's concerns and promises to provide information on current market trends and data sources.

Traffic and Transportation Concerns

- The speaker believes that the proposed development's reliance on personal vehicles is a problem because South Plainfield lacks adequate public transportation.
- The speaker notes that the traffic situation is "horrendous," especially at the intersection near the proposed development, which is a main truck route off of I-287.

Proposed Actions and Studies

- The speaker suggests gathering more localized data on traffic patterns coming off 287 to assure the board that the proposed ingress and egress are safe and will work.
- The speaker offers to conduct additional local studies on trip generation and parking, similar to studies done in other towns.

Parking and Access Issues

- The speaker thinks 48 parking spaces is a low estimate.
- The speaker uses Valley National Bank as an example of a business negatively impacted by difficult access.

Board's Concerns and Requests

- The board wants the applicant to address the parking situation, especially the ratio of inside to outside parking.
- The board wants the applicant to consult with the fire official regarding EV charging under the building and fire truck access.
- The board requests a fire hydrant on Durham Avenue.

Next Steps and Meeting

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- The applicant will return on March 25th to address the board's concerns with additional data and studies.
- The focus will be on local traffic studies, including counts of cars entering and exiting the building behind the proposed site.
- The application will be carried to the board's March 25th meeting at 7pm. Matt Flynn confirms no further notice will be provided.

Committee Reports:

- a. Street Naming Committee - Chairman Ackerman reports there are no new streets to be built.
- b. Council & Environmental Committee Report – Pete Smith – reports progress
- c. Mayoral Updates - Mayor Anesh is absent.

Minor Site Plan: None.

New Business: None.

Correspondence: None.

Audience Comments - other than agenda items: No one from the public appears.

Meeting adjourned at 10:25PM

Stephanie A. Merola
Planning Board Secretary