

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
DANIEL CRONHEIM, CHAIRMAN**

Regular Meeting [Virtual]
March 10, 2022

**OFFICIAL MINUTES
Adopted 3/31/22**

Chairman Cronheim called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. DJ Hunsinger

Mr. Richard Brown

Mr. Hank Kita

Ms. Sondra Fetchner

Mr. PJ Panzarella

Mr. Mitchell Taraschi

Mr. Wanye Hanlon

Dr. Richard Steinfeld

Mr. Daniel Cronheim, Chairman

David A. Stires, PE, PP, Board Engineer

Amanda C. Wolfe, Esq., Board Attorney

Theresa Snyder, Board Clerk

Chairman Cronheim called the regular meeting to order. He read the statement indicating the meeting was being conducted according to Open Public Meetings Act, the Municipal Land Use Law requirements, and the recording of the Minutes as required by law. In order to comply with the Executive Orders signed by the governor, and in an effort to follow best practices recommended by the CDC and DCA for emergency meeting protocol, the meeting was held virtually for all board members, board professionals, the applicant and interested parties and members of the public.

He then led the flag salute to the American flag, and the Board members identified themselves for the record.

MINUTES

On motion by Ms. Fetchner, seconded by Mr. Hunsinger, the Regular Meeting Minutes from February 10, 2022, were accepted based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Roll Call:

Ayes:

Mr. Hunsinger, Mr. Brown, Mr. Kita, Ms. Fetchner,
Mr. Panzarella, Mr. Taraschi, Mr. Hanlon, Dr. Steinfeld
and Chairman Cronheim

Nays:

Not Eligible:

Abstain:
Absent:

APPLICATION

Chairman Cronheim recused himself from the application.

Case No.: BA 21-05; KRE Group
1375 Plainfield Ave.
Block: 7010 Lot: 9
Represented By: Jason R. Tuvel, Esq.
RR ZONE

Mr. Tuvel, Esq., entered his appearance on behalf of the applicant. The subject property consisted of an existing office building on 2.11 acres. The applicant was proposing a redevelopment of the site. Improvements to the site would include demolishing the existing office building, reducing the lot coverage, and improving the stormwater management along with other site improvements. The applicants were seeking approval for the construction of a new, modern townhome complex consisting of 21 market rate units and 6 affordable housing units giving the Borough a 20% set aside. The applicant would present five witnesses.

Vice Chairman Hunsinger explained the procedure for hearing the application.

Ms. Wolf advised the Board to consider the waivers the applicant proposed.

Mr. Stires was sworn in to give testimony. His report outlined the applicant's request for waivers. He testified as to having no problem with the applicant's requests, and recommended the Board accept the waivers.

On motion by Mr. Hunsinger, seconded by Mr. Taraschi, the Board approved the waivers requested by the applicant based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Roll Call:

Ayes: Mr. Hunsinger, Mr. Brown, Mr. Kita, Ms. Fetchner,
Mr. Panzarella, Mr. Taraschi, Mr. Hanlon, and
Dr. Steinfeld

Nays:

Not Eligible:

Abstain:

Absent:

Mr. Noah Chrismer and Ms. Patrica Ruskan, PE, were sworn in to give testimony.

Mr. Chrismer, having a business address of 515 Marin Blvd., Jersey City, gave his credentials as the director of planning and entitlements for the KRE Group. He entered Exhibit A-1 consisting of 32 sheets. He gave a background of the KRE Group. Mr. Chrismer displayed Sheet 1- Portfolio- which summarized the number and types of projects the applicant has participated in throughout the state. Sheet 2- Recent New Jersey Projects- showed pictures of the various multi-family projects completed in the surrounding area. Sheet 6-A-1- Representation of Project- showed where the 27 units would be located throughout the site. Mr. Chrismer testified the main infrastructure would be kept in place while making significant improvements to the landscaping and stormwater management. The overall project would be a decrease of impervious coverage from the current conditions of the subject property.

Ms. Patricia Ruskan, PE, having a business address of 3 Mountain View Road, Warren, gave her credentials and was accepted by the board as a witness. Using Sheet 5- an arial view of Google earth image- Ms. Ruskan gave an orientation of the surrounding sites. The subject property hosted a 30,000 sq. ft. office building. The majority of the site was impervious coverage. The only access to the site was from Plainfield Ave. The property sloped from south to north. There were no wetlands on site.

Ms. Ruskan displayed Sheet 6-a colored rendering of the proposed landscape plan. She testified the applicant would demolish the existing office building and erect 27 residential units on the property. The 27 units would be dispersed throughout four buildings. Ms. Ruskan gave the breakdown of how many units would be in each building.

Ms. Ruskan testified the access to the residential site was from Plainfield Ave. This entrance would be expanded. The site would implement perpendicular parking. The applicant requested a waiver for the 7.5 ft. curb line setback, whereas, the Ordinance requires 10 ft. The applicant requested a waiver and de minimis exception from RSIS for the 20 ft. width roadway between Courts 1 and 2. Ms. Ruskan testified all roadways on the site would be private. Each townhouse unit would have individual garages and driveways, while the affordable units would have access to service parking adjacent to the unit. RSIS required a total of 64 parking spaces. The applicant proposed 42 garage and driveways spaces and 25 surface spaces. Also included would be 3 ADA spaces placed in the vicinity of the affordable units. The applicant was agreeable to include 11 onsite EV charging stations which by law would reduce the total number of spaces required on the site to 58 spaces.

Ms. Ruskan testified a sidewalk was proposed near building one for a bus stop. The applicant was agreeable to work with the county and school board on the requirements and exact placement of the bus stop. The site would have an 18 ft. wide emergency access from Drift Rd. with a gate. Emergency services would be given an access key for the gate. This access road would be part of the DOT access permit. The applicant already had initial discussion with the DOT.

Concerning the trash and recycling, the applicant proposed the townhouse units would store trash and recycling in their garage until it was brought to the curb on pick up days. The affordable

units would be provided with a trash/recycling enclosure. Removal of refuse on the property would be through private contractors.

The monument sign to be placed at the entrance of the site would be a total of 20 sq. ft. The applicant was seeking a variance for the sign which is not allowed in the RR Zone. The sign would not obstruct the site lines, and would be placed 5 ft. from the property line. Lighting on the site would include both 16ft. pole lighting with downward illumination and building mounted lighting on the front facades. All lighting would be LED.

The landscaping proposed on site would be a variety of native species. The applicant proposed a bioretention basin on the north side of the site. The existing basin would be converted into the bioretention basin. There would be seasonal plantings around the basin along with a variety of deciduous and shade trees. The ROW trees would remain with the exception of 2 trees located in the emergency access point. The applicant's plan would be to remove some of the existing trees. Tree removal was considered based on the impact of the root systems and tree canopy. The applicant would remove and replace trees.

Ms. Ruskan continued her testimony using Sheet 7- Grading Plan C-5. A majority of the site would be disturbed. Although the impervious coverage was reducing from 71% to 64.3%, the applicant still required a variance for impervious coverage. The grading on the site would accommodate a stormwater management plan consistent with the Borough's stormwater requirements as well as DEP and RSIS standards. The project required several retaining walls. The site would also require earthwork involving 5,100 cu. yds. of cut and 3,000 cu. yds. of fill.

The bioretention basin supported green infrastructure while meeting NJDEP regulations for drainage as a low impact strategy for managing run-off.

Ms. Ruskan testified the site had existing utility service. The sanitary sewer would be upgraded. The applicant has already received approval from Berkely Heights to accept the flow of the sanitary sewer. The applicant is working with New Jersey American Water to finalize how the development will receive services. The applicant received a will serve letter from PSE&G. The utilities will be below ground.

Mr. Joseph Staigar, having a business address of 245 Main St., Chester, NJ, was sworn in to give testimony. He gave his credentials as a traffic engineer and was accepted by the Board as a witness. Mr. Staigar testified the trip generation of 27 residential units would decrease the impact from the site during peak hours as compared to if the existing office building was functioning. According to his calculations, the site would generate 11 trips in the am peak hours and 14 trips in the pm peak hours. The traffic counts were conducted between 8 am – 9 am and again between 5 pm and 6 pm. The analysis of trip generation from the site provides a level service A with a minimal delay at the access point. Mr. Staigar opined the site would operate safely with no blind spots. The site met the RSIS standards with one deviation of the width of the multi-family courts which should be 24ft.; the applicant was proposing 20 ft. The site would accommodate maneuverability, and the applicant was not taking credit for the EV parking spaces

being included in this project. Mr. Staigar opined the site could accommodate the emergency vehicles and trash/recycling vehicles.

On question of Ms. Fetchner concerning the bus stop, Ms. Ruskan responded the applicant would work with Mr. Stires, the County, and the school board as to the optimal accommodation.

On question of Ms. Fetchner concerning the affordable unit's surface parking, Mr. Tuvel responded the number of spaces required by RSIS would be met, and the intent of the project is to meet residents and visitor parking needs.

Mr. Brown raised a concern about the coverage of the property being too dense. To which Mr. Tuvel responded the access pavement was going to be reduced by 40%, and the overall coverage would reduce from 71% to 64%.

On question of Dr. Steinfeld concerning solar capability, Mr. Chrismer responded that although the applicant did not provide for solar on the current proposal, the applicant would be agreeable to provide pre-wiring in each building for solar connection for future use as a condition to approval.

On question of Mr. Hanlon concerning the color and temperature of the LED lighting being proposed, Ms. Ruskan agreed to work with Mr. Stires to choose an appropriate color and temperature light.

Speaking to Mr. Panzarella's concern that the site was tight for emergency vehicles, Ms. Ruskan responded the applicant was in contact with the fire official about the vehicle access onto the site, and the fire official did not take issue with the plan. The applicant would be in contact with him about fire hydrant placement. Further, Ms. Ruskan responded to Mr. Panzarella that the DOT does not want a depressed curb. The only vehicles accessing that point would be emergency service vehicles.

On question of Mr. Brown concerning snow removal, Mr. Tuvel responded a management company will be responsible to remove snow from the site. Mr. Chrismer also responded that the applicant would covenant to the emergency access and snow removal in a developer's agreement.

Mr. Chrismer also agreed that as a condition of approval which would run with the land to state whether the units would be rental or for sale.

In response to Mr. Brown's concern that the traffic study was conducted based on 2017 plans, Mr. Staigar responded the traffic volume on Plainfield Ave. in 2017 was the most pre-covid numbers. He bumped it up 4 years according to the DOT rule. The level service is A. Mr. Staigar reminded the Board there was an existing office building that could be functional again in the future thus creating a greater impact to traffic than the proposed residential project.

On question of Ms. Fetchner concerning larger cars hanging over the driveway, Mr. Staigar used A-2-Vehicle Circulation Plan- to respond that the driveway spaces could accommodate both smaller vehicles with an average length of 16 ft. and larger vehicles 18ft. in length. Mr. Tuvel stated the applicant could include in the by-laws where the residents were permitted to park.

In response to Vice Chairman Hunsinger's suggestion that oversized vehicles should not be parked on site, Mr. Tuvel offered there could be a condition regulating the size of vehicles allowed on site. The applicant would be willing to work with Mr. Stires.

On question of Mr. Panzarella concerning slowing down the flow of water before it reaches the basin, Ms. Ruskan responded they would have to review the plans and taking Mr. Panzarella's suggestion to possibly include a trench drain on Plainfield Ave., the applicant would be agreeable and would work with Mr. Stires on that issue.

The applicant agreed to a condition that they would maintain the trees for two years.

The meeting was opened to the public.

Rich Piazza, 27 Hampton Drive, asked Mr. Staigar whether there was a difference between the number of residential vehicles or employee vehicles filtering on side streets to which Mr. Staigar responded that throughout the course of the day, the residential vehicles would proportionally make more traffic. He reemphasized the key was peak hours not how the traffic diffused throughout the surrounding areas, but generally, the off hours would not see an influx of traffic greater than what would be produced during the morning and evening peak hours.

John Foster, 87 Hampton Dr., Berkeley Heights, asked if the applicant would seek approval from the county to make left hand turns to which Mr. Staigar responded the applicant would seek approval from the county to make left hand turns. Mr. Staigar explained a significant impact would be 100 trips generated during peak hours. Mr. Foster also inquired about the bus stop. Mr. Staigar responded the decision as to placement of the stop would be determined by the Board of Education.

Chad Miller, 111 Hampton Drive, Berkeley Heights, asked whether the traffic study based on 2017 calculations considered the difference between the office building and residential use and did the traffic study consider the impact on other streets to which Mr. Staigar responded the traffic study did consider the difference between the office building and residential impacts to traffic, but did not study its effects on surrounding streets.

The meeting was closed to the public.

After the five-minute recess all Board members identified themselves for the record. Dr. Steinfeld was not present.

Mark Kushner, having a business address of 485 Marin Blvd., Jersey City, was sworn in to give testimony. He gave his credentials as an architect and was accepted by the Board. He used

Sheet 10- to show the buildings would be three story structures with COAH flats distributed throughout the site. Sheet 11- A rendering of the proposed site which depicted a neighborhood people would enjoy viewing. The approach of the rendering was from Plainfield Ave. The facades would have upgraded materials. Sheet 13 showed the longest building which boasted gables and bay windows of varying sizes. The COAH stacked flats blended in with the other units. The exterior lighting would be controlled by the unit itself. The rear of the building would have sliding doors and patios at the ground level and second floor decks. The side facade had a vertical element and board and baton material. Brick would also be used as well as a significant amount of fenestration to add a visible element. There would be no roof mounted equipment. Sheet 17 showed the two major brick colors which were tan and red. Vertical and horizontal board and baton would be used along with two kinds of roofing, metal and asphalt. Weather vanes would be installed on each building. The tallest building was building #3 with a total height of 40'8" which would be located 230 ft. from Plainfield Ave.

On question of Mr. Taraschi, concerning generators, Mr. Kushner responded the applicant did not consider generators as part of the application; generators would be a decision of the homeowners in compliance to local zoning criteria.

The meeting was open to the public.

Chad Miller inquired as to the intent of making the project greener. Mr. Kushner responded the project was a brownfield development the improvements would be in stormwater, infrastructure, LED lighting, and EV charging stations.

There were no other comments from the public.

ADJOURN

The Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,



Theresa Snyder
Board Clerk