

THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
Planning Board
Reorganizational & Regular Meeting
January 18, 2022

OFFICIAL MINUTES
Adopted 2/15/22

Chairwoman Tracee Schaefer called the Reorganizational and Regular Meeting to order at 6:30 pm

ROLL CALL

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman	Mr. Steve Pote
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman	Mr. Paul Fiorilla (absent)
Mr. Keith Balla, Mayor	Mr. Troy Sims
Mr. Pietro Martino, Councilman	Ms. Yvette Nora
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary	Mr. Francis P. Linnus, Esq.
Mr. Al Ellis (arrived 7:02 pm)	Mr. Richard Calbi Jr., Board Engineer
Ms. Karen Pennett	Mr. John Jahr, Board Traffic Engineer
	Ms. Theresa Snyder, Board Clerk

Chairwoman Schaefer read the statement indicating the meeting was being held in compliance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 of the Open Public Meetings Act, the Municipal Land Use Law requirements, and the recording of the Minutes as required by law. She also stated that in order to comply with the executive orders signed by the governor, and in an effort to follow best practices recommended by the CDC, the meeting was being held virtually for all board members, board professionals, the applicant, the applicant's professionals, interested parties and members of the public. The Board members identified themselves for the record. She then led the flag salute to the American flag.

REORGANIZATION FOR 2022

OATHS OF OFFICE

Donald Speeney
Ellen Spingler
Pete Martino
Troy Sims

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Chairperson

On motion by Mr. Speeney, seconded by Ms. Spingler, the election of Tracee Schaefer to Chairwoman was accepted based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes: Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett,
Mayor Balla, Mr. Speeney, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:
Not Eligible:
Abstain:
Absent: Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

Vice-Chairperson

On motion by Chairwoman Schaefer, seconded by Ms. Pennett, the election of Donald Speeney to Vice-Chairman was accepted and based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes: Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett,
Mayor Balla, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:
Not Eligible:
Abstain:
Absent: Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

Secretary

On motion by Mr. Speeney, seconded by Mr. Pote, the election of Ellen Spingler to Secretary was accepted and based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes: Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett,
Mayor Balla, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:
Not Eligible:
Abstain:
Absent: Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution PB 22-R1

Calendar of Regular Meetings

On motion by Chairwoman Schaefer, seconded by Mr. Speeney, the calendar of regular meeting dates for 2022 was accepted based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes: Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett,
Mayor Balla, Mr. Speeney, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:
Not Eligible:
Abstain:
Absent: Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

Resolution PB 22-R2
Adoption of By-Laws

On motion by Chairwoman Schaefer, seconded by Mr. Speeney, the calendar of regular meeting dates for 2022 was accepted based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes:	Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett, Mayor Balla, Mr. Speeney, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:	
Not Eligible:	
Abstain:	
Absent:	Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

Resolution PB 22-R3
Designation of Official Newspapers

On motion by Chairwoman Schaefer, seconded by Ms. Pennett, the official newspapers for 2022 were accepted based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes:	Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett, Mayor Balla, Mr. Speeney, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:	
Not Eligible:	
Abstain:	
Absent:	Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

Resolution PB 22-R4
Appointment of Board Professionals

On motion by Chairwoman Schaefer, seconded by Mr. Speeney, the appointment of professionals for 2022 was accepted based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes:	Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett, Mayor Balla, Mr. Speeney, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:	
Not Eligible:	
Abstain:	
Absent:	Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

The board professionals were sworn in to give testimony for the calendar year of 2022.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Site Plan and Sub-division Committee:

Tracee Schaefer
Donald Speeney
Ellen Spingler
Troy Sims
Steve Pote- Alternate
Paul Fiorilla- Alternate

County Planning Liason:

Tracee Schaefer
Donald Speeney
Al Ellis
Mayor Keith Balla

Ordinance Committee:

Tracee Schaefer
Donald Speeney
Pete Martino
Francis P. Linnus, Esq.
Yvette Nora- Alternate
Steve Pote- Alternate

Environmental Committee:

Karen Pennett

Finance Committee:

Tracee Schaefer
Theresa Snyder

The Board adjourned to the regular meeting.

MINUTES

On motion by Ms. Spingler, seconded by Ms. Pennett, the minutes Regular Meeting Minutes, December 14, 2021 were accepted and carried on voice vote.

RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION PB 22-R5
CASE NO.: PB 19-01; BONNIE BURN
BONNIE BURN ROAD REDEVELOPMENT
Final Site Plan Approval
BLOCK: 7402/7403 LOT: 19.01 19.02 5 & 10
Represented By: Nicole B. Dory, Esq.
BBRRA Zone
Preliminary Approval: 10/27/21
Final Approval: 12/14/21

On motion by Mr. Speeney, seconded by Ms. Spingler, the resolution was memorialized based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:

Ayes:	Ms. Spingler, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett, Mayor Balla, Mr. Speeney, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, Ms. Nora
Nays:	
Not Eligible:	
Abstain:	
Absent:	Mr. Ellis and Mr. Fiorilla

APPLICATION

CASE NO.: PB 21-02; LAWRENCE LAW
744 MOUNTAIN BLVD.
BLOCK: 102 LOT: 15
Represented By: Richard Sasso, Esq.
BB ZONE
Expiration: 3/19/22

Mr. Richard Sasso, Esq. entered his appearance on behalf of the applicant. The notice was sufficient and served in a timely manner giving the board jurisdiction to act.

The applicant proposed a minor site plan for a law office located at 744 Mountain Blvd. The applicant had three witnesses.

Mr. Speeney read the site plan committee report into the record.

Ms. Lawrence having a business address of 776 Mountain Blvd., Watchung, was sworn in to give testimony. She gave a summary of her background and was accepted by the Board as a witness. Ms. Lawrence testified that she closed on the property in December, 2021. The proposed use for the subject property would be to move her family law practice into the space. There are eight lawyers in her firm with a total of 14 employees. They designed the first floor as mediation/conference room space with the top floor to be used as office space.

Ms. Sharon Williams of 740 Mountain Blvd., Watchung wanted to ask a question about the landscaping plans. She had to wait for Mr. Titus' testimony.

Ms. Constance Salustro, having a business address of 34522 N. Scottsdale Rd., Scottsdale, AZ, was sworn in to give testimony. She gave her credentials as an architect and was accepted by the Board as a witness.

EXHIBIT A-1- Electronic Copies of Renderings. There were two different versions of A-1 because the print machine did not print the colors correctly. Ms. Salustro wanted to go back to drawings A-1 through A-7. There were no digital architectural plans to display. The Board received paper copies of A-1-A-7. The first drawing discussed was A-1. It showed both floor one and floor two. The building layout is a bi-level. Currently, the building was divided into four office suites. The main entrance is located in the front of the building, although it is not used as often as the rear entrance located by the back area parking lot. The building is a plain block building with a front portico. The rear stairs are in the back of the building. Generally, the existing building was in disrepair.

A-4 and A-5 showed the upper level and lower level floor plans. There would be two additions to the existing building. The lower level would have a conference room and the upper level would be designated as office space. The second addition will serve as the building's new entrance. This addition would also contain an elevator which is not a requirement.

A-6 and A-7 are the proposed building elevations. There would be varied building materials used to add interest. Existing windows would be replaced. There would also be metal Bahama shutters to add another dimension. The same exterior finishes would be used for the rear of the building. The elevator shaft would be covered in stone veneer. The BB Zone allows for two-story buildings. The building is compatibly designed with other buildings in the area. The finishes would be similar to other buildings in the area.

A-1 and A-2 try to show realistic views of the front and rear views. The color would be a varied hue of gray blue. The new roofs will be dark gray asphalt singles. Window trims would be a lighter color.

There would be four new HVAC units added to the roof. There would be new electrical service. The applicant would use existing utilities. There is a parapet on the building to hide the electrical equipment on the roof.

On question of Mr. Pote concerning handicap access, Ms. Salustro responded that office buildings under 10,000 sq. ft. that are not medical do not have to provide an elevator. Ms. Lawrence would furnish the building with ADA bathrooms as well. The elevator will have three stops for a two-floor building. The elevator would not accommodate an EMS stretcher.

On question of Mayor Balla concerning any other entrance, Ms. Salustro responded that the building meets the parameters of a one exit building according to the international building code. She also had previously discussed that with Robert LaCosta, the Building Official.

Councilman Martino made a comment about the fire suppression system. He reiterated the importance of a fire suppression system and ask if the applicant would consider it.

Board members expressed concern over having one means of exit from the building to which Ms. Salustro responded that the building met the code.

The meeting was opened up to the public.

Mr. W. Leland Titus, having a business address of 618 Somerset St., No. Plainfield, NJ, was sworn in to give testimony. He gave his credentials as an engineer and was accepted by the Board as a witness. Mr. Titus gave the existing conditions of the property. The property was situated on Mountain Blvd. It generally slopes toward Mountain Blvd. It is surrounded by Higgins Funeral Home and a residential flag lot. There appeared to be existing water problems in the building caused by the parking lot. The parking lot has been overlaid several times and needs repair.

Sheet 2- Proposed Grading Plan. The existing driveway is narrow and only supports one lane of traffic. The applicant proposes to expand the driveway to allow for two-way traffic. Mr. Titus sifted the parking lot toward the Higgins Funeral property to make the entrance to the parking lot safer to access. There are 14 spaces on the easternly side and 11 spaces on the westerly side.

Sheet 5- Parking Calculations. There should be 28 spaces. The front of the building could accommodate 5 spaces. The application proposed 5 banked spaces in the front of the building.

Mr. Titus went through the zoning schedule. Originally there was going to be a 3 ft. strip dedicated to Somerset County. The County did not want the additional 3 ft. making the lot size to remain as is. The County reviewed the application in its entirety. There were pre-existing, non-conforming conditions. The applicant required one waiver for the parking in the back. The applicant proposed 5 ft. whereas, 10 ft. is required.

Sheet 4- Landscape Plan. There were three large trees in the back of the property. Two could possibly be saved. Mr. Titus discussed the tree replacement plan.

The building currently had utilities servicing the building with certain upgrades necessary. There would be LED lighting installed in the parking lot. The lights would be 15 ft. with a house-side shield to block spill over onto adjoining property. The signage on the property would include a monument sign toward the front of the property. SHEET 3- showed the monument sign proposal.

SHEET 5- Showed the striping in the parking lot. The handicap space would have light blue lines and appropriate signage.

On question by Chairwoman Schaefer concerning the easement, Mr. Titus referred to SHEET 1. The prior owners did a flag lot and the staff of the flag lot was the easement. The easement was not part of the application.

SHEET 3-Garbage Detail- it is an enclosure with regular garbage cans. This was a typical choice for smaller buildings.

Board members expressed concern about losing the existing trees on the property.

Councilman Martino suggested including a sign that said yield to exiting traffic. The applicant stipulated to the recommendation to include a sign that would depict the lane narrowing.

On question of Councilman Martino, Mr. Linnus responded that if there were changes to occupancy, they would have to come back to the board.

The meeting was opened to the public,

Ms. Williams, 740 Mountain Blvd., asked about the lights in the parking lot. Mr. Titus responded that the lights are box lights which are directed down with a back shield to direct the light down and away from the William's property as displayed on SHEET 4. On question of Ms. Williams concerning landscape buffering, Mr. Titus responded that the applicant would add additional planting to buffer the properties.

Mr. Bob Willett, 5 Mountain Ct., Warren, NJ, expressed that part of his property was located in Watchung. He asked about the landscaping on the border of the property line.

Mr. Calbi went through his engineering review letter. Mr. Titus said he would comply with the comments and would work with Mr. Calbi. Mr. Calbi expressed concern about the egress from

the building and suggested the applicant remove a parking space to accommodate to which Mr. Titus responded that he would try to move the entire parking lot.

Mr. Calbi informed the Board that the applicant would have to post a bond for the banked parking spaces.

Mr. Linnus reviewed the variances being requested by the applicant and what steps had been taken to mitigate those variances.

Board members made suggestions about controlling the brightness of the lights in the parking lot.

The conditions to approval were read.

Mr. Willett made a comment about a 48 in. maple which he did not feel needed to be saved. He suggested that rather than the parking lot being moved to save the maple tree, he wanted the Williams property to be preserved.

On motion by Chairwoman Schaefer, seconded by Mr. Speeney, the board directed Mr. Linnus to draft a resolution in the affirmative based on the following roll call vote:

Roll Call:


Ayes:	Ms. Spingler, Mr. Ellis, Councilman Martino, Ms. Pennett, Mayor Balla, Mr. Speeney, Mr. Pote, Mr. Sims, and Chairwoman Schaefer
Nays:	
Not Eligible:	
Abstain:	
Absent:	Mr. Fiorilla

The meeting was opened to the public. There were no comments from the public.

ADJOURN

The Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,


Theresa Snyder
Board Clerk