

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING  
March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 | 7:30 PM  
15 Mountain Blvd., Watchung, NJ 07069  
Adopted On: 4/15/2025**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairwoman Schaefer called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:27 pm. and read the opening 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 and proper notice had been given. Chairwoman Schaefer led the group in saluting the American flag and the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL:**

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- present	Mr. Dustin Antonio – present
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – present	Mr. Troy Sims – present
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – present	Ms. Jackie Bodnar – present
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman – <b>(Absent)</b>	Mr. Francis P. Linnus, Esq. - present
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – present	Mr. Mark Healey, PP – present
Ms. Jennifer Kobliska- <b>(Absent)</b>	Mr. Richard Calbi Jr., Board Engineer – <b>(Absent)</b>
Ms. Karen Pennett – <b>(Absent)</b>	Mr. John Jahr, Board Traffic Engineer - present
Mr. Stephen Pote - <b>(Absent)</b>	Mr. Greg Rapp, Bright View Engineer - present
	Ms. Catherine Furlan Board Clerk- present

A quorum was present for the meeting.

**MINUTES**

Chair asked for the reading of the Regular and Reorg minutes to be waived from the February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 meeting and for a motion to approve. On motion by Ms. Spingler and seconded by Mayor Jubin. Don Speeney did not vote and everyone else unanimously voted to approve the minutes.

Chairwoman Schaefer stated that no Executive Session would take place tonight. Mr. Linnus stated he would update the Board on the pending litigation after pre-trial arguments were heard.

**NEW APPLICATIONS:**

**PB24-02; RAISING CANE’S**

Proposed Fast-Food Restaurant with Drive-Thru  
Blue Star Shopping Center  
Block 6404, Lots 2.01, 2.02, 2.03, & 2.04

The Applicant proposes to replace the existing +/-8,616 sf Hibachi Grill & Supreme Buffet pad site fronting on Route 22 with a 3,760-sf Raising Cane's restaurant with a 2-lane drive thru. Applicant is seeking the following variances:

1. Front Yard Setback: (100-foot minimum required, 81.2 feet existing, 86.6 feet proposed)
2. Minimal Habitable Floor Area: (5,000 square feet minimum required, 420,014 square feet proposed)
3. Minimum Number of Loading Spaces: 1 is required, and 0 are proposed
4. Off-Street Parking: (1,889 spaces required, 1,736 spaces existing (consisting of 1,669 spaces + 67 EV space credit), 1,668 spaces proposed (consisting of 1,601 spaces + 67 EV space credit))
5. Maximum Impervious Coverage on slopes less than or equal to 10%: 75% required, 60.74% proposed
6. Building-Mounted Signage a. Area: Permitted: 10% of wall area/ no individual sign shall exceed 100 square feet Front elevation – 3 signs totaling 187.82 square feet (16.87% of wall area) Painted mural – 139.5 square feet (individual sign) b. Width: Permitted: 50% of wall width Front elevation – 3 signs totaling 33.79 feet of sign width (62.23% of wall width) c. Vertical Dimension: Permitted –5 feet “Red Dog” – 8 feet Painted mural – 9 feet

Michael O'Grodnick Esq from Savo, Schalk approached the podium as council on behalf of the Applicant and gave an update. He also clarified any and all notices (as they previously noticed three times). It was confirmed the Board had jurisdiction. Chairwoman Schaefer stated the Board bifurcates applications into preliminary and final. She also stated the Board has a bewitching hour of 10pm, unless they are in the middle of testimony. Applicant will proceed with preliminary approval only. Mr. O'Grodnick proceeded to give background on the application and development of the site, listing the variances sought.

Four witnesses were present and the following three gave testimony; Melissa Brotschul Property Development Manager for Raising Cane's, Robert Streker from Bohler Engineering, and Paul Going as Traffic Engineer from Atlantic TBD.

Don Speeney read the Site Visit Committee report into the record. Next, Ms. Melissa Brotschul from 12-3 Wilde Ave, Drexel Hill, PA 19026 was sworn in and provided testimony providing background of Raising Cane's. She addressed concerns about safety, trash, number of employees, and hours of operations. Chairwoman Schaefer questioned the number of employees (55-65 total 13-15 per shift) and training. Chairwoman Schaefer asked about security (which will be provided during peak hours, events or the honeymoon period and a third party would be hired) and late nights? Don Speeney questioned the amount of parking and if employees would be parking onsite (yes, there should be ample parking)? Mr. Antonio questioned the number of employees for the drive thru (2-3)? Mayor Jubin questioned the hours of operation and concern over the closing at 3:30am. He requested some assurances for security and concerns over lighting in Blue Star in general. Mr. Speeney expressed concern for the drive thru crew member safety.

Mr. O'Grodnick cited the [Public Safety Agreement](#) with Blue Star stating that Watchung PD is paid unlimited overtime to pick up patrols in the shopping center. Levin Properties also has three digital license plate reading cameras with 24/7 monitoring. Mr. O'Grodnick will provide the safety agreement for the resolution.

Next, Robert Streker from *Bohler Engineering*, 30 Independence Blvd, Warren, NJ, approached the Board and was sworn in. Mr. Streker provided his credentials and was accepted as an expert in his field.

Mr. Streker presented [Exhibit A-1 Ariel Map](#) dated September 17, 2024. [Exhibit A-2 Colorized copy of C-103 from Plan Set](#) with proposed landscaping 03/18/2025. [Exhibit A-3 C301 Colorized Proposed Site Plan](#) dated 03/18/2025. Mr. Streker reviewed his exhibits and variances being requested. Mr. Linnus asked if the Applicant was agreeable to complying with the Fire Official's report (yes).

[Exhibit A4-5 Sheet EL1 Building Elevations](#) March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Mr. Speeney commented about the lighting and the establishment being so close to the highway. Mayor Jubin questioned deliveries being conducted one hour before opening and or closing. He expressed concern for residents up the mountain, as sound travels. Mayor Jubin also commented about the grease traps and to consult the Board of Health for maintenance and cleaning. Mr. Speeney asked about the patio and if it will be delineated from the roadway (yes trees and curbs will section it off)? Chairwoman Shaefer opened it up to the public for questions for the two witnesses, hearing none, it was closed.

Paul Going, from *Atlantic TBD Warren*, NJ approached the Board and was sworn in. Mr. Going provided his credentials and was accepted as an expert in his field. Mr. Going went over the site and the Traffic Study report last updated March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025. He reviewed the parking on site and in the shopping center, affirming it is adequate and the drive-thru que will accommodate 15-23 vehicles. He noted the plan is slightly outdated and a new one would be submitted, but would not affect their findings. Mr. Going mentioned a NJ DOT permit would be required and it is in progress.

John Jahr from *Bright View Engineering* responded to Mr. Going's testimony. He said most of the lighting has already been built in Blue Star. In regards to the parking, there is ample parking onsite and the que is adequate. This restaurant has a limited menu which will make the que go faster compared to other restaurants. It was noted the Board should be cc on all correspondence with NJ DOT. Mr. Jahr stressed there is no concern for the overall community and traffic. Mr. Jahr's concerns revolved around the egress out of the site, which is to the detriment of the Applicant. Item number 54A. in Mr. Jahr's report was called into question by Chairwoman Schaefer. Mr. Jahr said the Applicant's testimony and the reports have proved the site's traffic pattern will work.

Mr. Healey, Board Planner ran through some of his questions. Healey pointed out only 2 garbage cans were listed on the site and none in the parking lot. Outdoor dining signage details should be added to the plans for final approval. Commercial site buildings should be tied into other buildings and the Applicant needs to prove it will be cohesive. Applicant also has to show roof top equipment and provide screening for it, showing it on the plans. A list of waivers was submitted by Boehler, but still need to be addressed include; ADA loading areas, striping of the parking lot, width of planting beds, loading area, lighting standards, trees and construction easements and finally lighting throughout the shopping center and main access roads. John Jahr

recommended the Applicant come back with a lighting plan or schedule. Mr. Rapp had questions on parking and EV chargers and any amenities in the seating area? Mr. Speeney questioned Mr. Going about crash and or police reports at other NJ Raising Cane's (sites were open less than 6 months so no data was available). Mr. Linnus also agreed the Applicant is light on his lighting testimony and perhaps an expert witness would be helpful. Chairwoman Schaefer opened it up to the public for comment, hearing none, public portion was closed.

Mr. O'Grodnick confirmed they would continue with testimony from the Civil Engineer, licensed Architect and Planner at the next meeting. Mr. Linnus announced the case would be carried with no further notice required, to the Tuesday, April 15<sup>th</sup> meeting at 7:30pm.

### **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS.**

Madam Chair opened it up to the public for comment. Hearing none, comments were closed.

The meeting adjourned at 10:02 pm with a motion to adjourn by Ms. Spingler. The next Regular Meeting will be Tuesday, April 15th, 2025 at 7:30pm.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Respectfully Submitted,



Catherine Furlan

Board Clerk