

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING**

**April 15th, 2025 | 7:30 PM**

15 Mountain Blvd., Watchung, NJ 07069

**Adopted On: 5/27/2025**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Madam Chair was absent, Vice Chair Speeney called the regular meeting to order at 7:29 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. Vice Chair led the group in saluting the American flag and the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL:

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- <b>(Absent)</b>	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>	Andrew Larson Bright View Engineer - Present
Ms. Karen Pennett – present	Mr. John Jahr, Board Traffic Engineer - <b>(Absent)</b>
Mr. Stephen Pote - <b>(Absent)</b>	Mr. Greg Rapp, Bright View Engineer - <b>(Absent)</b>
	Ms. Catherine Furlan Board Clerk- present

It was noted that a quorum was present for the meeting. Vice Chair Speeney also noted the passing of Donald Pote, Steven Pote’s father and long-time volunteer for Watchung.

**MINUTES**

Vice Chair asked for the reading of the regular minutes to be waived from the March 18th, 2025 meeting and for a motion to approve. On motion by Mayor Jubin and seconded by Ms. Spingler. Karen Pennett was absent last meeting and did not vote, everyone else who was present unanimously voice voted to approve the minutes.

Mr. Linnus stated that no Executive Session would take place tonight, but one would be needed next month. Ms. Spingler called the first and only applicant, Raising Cane’s and it was noted that this application was continuing from last month’s meeting.

**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

[Click Here](#) for Plans. 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 was absent. Mr. Alexander Fisher, filling in on his behalf from Savo Schalk, provided background on the application and testimony to be heard.

Next, Robert Streker from *Bohler Engineering*, 30 Independence Blvd, Warren, NJ, approached the podium and was reminded he remained sworn in from the last meeting. Mr. Streker addressed Mr. Healey's prior comments about lighting. The lighting that was previously submitted for Shoprite has already been constructed. Mr. Streker discussed modifying the lighting onsite in Exhibit A-3. Mr. Streker reviewed the variances being sought for lighting at the entrances and exits off Route 22. The waivers being requested were reviewed from Mr. Healey's March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 letter. Ms. Pennet asked about the hours and lighting and if lights would be dimmed at anytime while expressing concern for those that live on Johnston Drive. Mr. Streker said the lights would not be dimmed, but that the lights would shine downward and would be an improvement over what is currently in place. Mr. Speeney opened it to the public for questions, hearing none, public questions were closed.

Mr. James Kassay from ADA Architects, 1770 Detroit Ave, Lakewood, Ohio, approached the podium and was sworn in. He provided his credentials and was accepted as an expert in his field. Mr. Kassay reviewed the Floor Plan Sheet SK1.0 dated March 7, 2025 which was previously submitted as part of their application to the Board. He then reviewed Sheet EEL-1 Exterior Elevations dated March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025. He provided testimony about how compatible the building would be with surrounding stores and the types of materials to be utilized.

Mayor Jubin asked if this site has been adapted or if all Raising Cane's are alike (yes, it has been adapted somewhat to fit with the site). Jubin asked if this footprint has been used before and if it presents any problems with access in and out of the site (the whole site is ADA compliant and accessible). Then, Mayor Jubin asked if they had considered a 500,00 square foot building (no).

Mr. Andrew Larson from Bright View Engineering was sworn in and accepted as a professional in his field. Mr. Larson asked the Applicant about accessories in the outdoor seating area and if any would be provided (yes, tables, chairs and benches)? Is there any way to close off or monitor the outdoor eating area after hours (yes, it will be closed off and monitored).

Mr. Speeney asked about the lighting again, will it be too much, and/or an eyesore or beacon? Mr. Kassey provided testimony about how the site will flow with lighting and not an eyesore, but provide pleasant ambiance.

Spach Trahan approached as the Applicant's Planner to provide testimony from Phillips, Preiss, Grygiel, Leheny Hughes LLC. She provided her credentials and was accepted as a licensed Planner in NJ. Ms. Trahan provided background on the application from a planning perspective and reviewed the variances and waivers being sought. Mr. Linnus asked about the loading space (which is a waiver as none are proposed and one is required). Loading spaces would not be needed since loading would be done during off hours. Overall, the positive criteria outweigh the negative as the site is being economically developed. Ms. Trahan cited the Borough's Master Plan which supports economic development/revitalization and job creation.

Melissa Brotschul, Property Development Manager for Raising Cane's, approached the podium and was reminded she was previously sworn in. Ms. Pennet asked about the garbage bins and if there would be recycling bins? Yes, the trash enclosure has a trash compactor and recycling bins are separate onsite. Mark Healey commented on figures for off street parking 1,891 required, 1,668 proposed with 67 EV spaces. Traffic Report cited 1,568 spaces, 32 banked and 67 EV credit. Then, there was some discussion about murals and front elevation variances cited in Mark Healey's report dated March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Mr. Speeney opened it to the public for questions, hearing none, it was closed.

Mr. Speeney asked a question in regards to **Exhibit EL1number #3** about the inside drive thru lane vs. the outside drive thru lane. There was some discussion and concern about safety and procedure or mechanisms to ensure safety. Mr. Speeney requested some safety/accident data from other sites. Ms. Pennet asked about cash and credit payments. Mayor Jubin asked if outdoor dining would be seasonal? (It would be open all year round, but inclement weather would be considered and closed). Mr. Antonio asked about loading during the day while it was open (no). Is there a night shift (no). Ms. Bodnar asked about time restrictions for the second lane (only during peak hours, lunch and diner rush). Comments were opened to the public, hearing none, it was closed.

Mayor Jubin inquired about the pending approvals from other agencies. There was some discussion again over hours of operation being open until 3:30am. He stressed hiring local police officers and the need for the agreement to be updated since the Shoprite one is outdated. Mr. Fisher said the Applicant offered to match the hours of Wendy's, so it would close at 2am. Mayor Jubin expressed concern over the pending approvals the Applicant still needs to obtain (fire, police, Environmental Commission).

Ms. Pennet read into the record the Environmental Commission's letter dating October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024.

Mr. Streker approached the podium, and brought up outstanding engineering items which was previously discussed with Mr. Jahr. He stated all the items were satisfactory. The building does not need to be moved. Mr. Speeney brought up private police services and title 39. Mr. Linnus confirmed an updated agreement would be drafted with the Borough Attorney. Mayor Jubin stressed the need again for an up-to-date report and approvals from Fire and Police. Robert Streker noted a letter from the Police Department dated October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2024, saying it was very positive. The Fire Department did submit comments and those have all been addressed. Mr. Healey reminded the Board they could vote only on Preliminary since they have to come back for Final Approvals. It was opened to the public for comment, hearing none it was closed. Mr. Healey offered some conditions for approval such as compliance. He also stated that the Applicant has addressed all items in his report. He did mention the Applicant should add more trash receptacles. Mr. Healey also pointed out the lack of trees on the southern and eastern lines of the property. Clarification should be brought as to why the Applicant cannot plant in the construction easements.

The Board decided not to vote on Preliminary approval until a resolution is drafted with conditions. The Board voted on the affirmative to draft a Resolution on Motion by Ms. Springler seconded by Mayor Jubin. No further notice is required for the Applicant and the case would be carried to May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025. It was noted an extension would be needed to the end of May and the Applicant would submit a written request.

**ROLL CALL:**

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- <b>(Absent)</b>	Mr. Dustin Antonio – Aye
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – Aye	Mr. Troy Sims – Aye
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – Aye	Ms. Jackie Bodnar – Aye
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman – <b>(Absent)</b>	Ms. Jennifer Kobliska- <b>(Absent)</b>
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
	Mr. Stephen Pote - <b>(Absent)</b>

Mr. Speeney asked for an update on PB25-01; American Recycling Technologies. The application is still incomplete and going through the process. Mr. Speeney asked about Bonnie Burn and the Club House redesign, which will be next month in May. The meeting adjourned at 9:26 pm. The next Regular Meeting will be Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Respectfully Submitted,



Catherine Furlan  
Board Clerk