

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

**May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025 | 7:30 PM**

15 Mountain Blvd., Watchung, NJ 07069

**Adopted On: 06/17/2025**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Madam Chair called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:28 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 published in the Echoes Sentinal and Courier News. Chair 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 - present	Mr. Francis P. Linnus, Esq. - present
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – present	Mr. Mark Healey, PP – present
Ms. Jennifer Kobliska- <b>(Absent)</b>	James Giurintano Bright View Engineer – Present
Ms. Karen Pennett – present	Mr. John Jahr, Board Traffic Engineer - <b>(Absent)</b>
Mr. Stephen Pote - present	Ms. Catherine Furlan Board Clerk- present

It was noted that a quorum was present for the meeting. Chairwoman Schaefer opened the meeting announcing the resignation of Board member, Jennifer Kobliska and thanked her for her service.

**MINUTES**

Madam Chair asked to waive the reading of the regular minutes from the April 15th, 2025 meeting and for a motion to approve. On motion by Don Speeney and seconded by Karen Pennett and followed by a unanimous voice vote to approve.

**RESOLUTION PB R-6:** Ms. Spingler read the resolution into the record for a closed session in accordance to the Open Public Meetings Act. On motion to adopt Resolution PB R-6 by Mayor Jubin and seconded by Councilman Gibbs.

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	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 - Aye	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye

The Board went into private, closed session at 7:33pm and resumed the public session at 7:36pm. Chair sought a motion for Mr. Linnus to continue to represent the Borough for litigation and not to exceed an additional \$10,000. On motion by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Mr. Speeney.

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	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 - Aye	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye

**RESOLUTION PB25-R7**

**CASE NO.; 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

Mr. Linnus explained that the Board decided not to vote at the last meeting on Preliminary approval until a resolution was drafted with conditions.

Michael O’Grodnick was present and requested 3 additional conditions be added to the resolution. First, the Applicant would like approval to start demolition of the site while they move for Final Site Plan approvals. Next, O’Grodnick mentioned Mr. Streker connected with the Environmental Commission and they requested a rain garden be added instead of the southern swale. Lastly, he mentioned an obstacle with DOT approvals and time restraints. The Applicant would like to move for Final Site Plan approval while they obtain DOT permits which could be a condition added to the resolution.

Mr. Streker approached the Board and was reminded he was still under oath. Mr. Streker presented a colorized [Exhibit A-3](#) of the proposed rain garden. The drainage sheet would detail the rain garden. Ms. Pennett thanked Mr. Streker for listening to the Environmental Commissions comments. Jaime Giurintano from Bright View Engineering asked if they had any soils information for depth to ground water? Mr. Streker said he would be providing for an overflow and any overflow reports would be submitted to Bright View Engineer. Madam chair opened it to the public for questions, hearing none, it was closed.

Ms. Spingler read into the record the resolution pausing at condition 20 and 21 for added conditions. The words “conditional use approval” was added to the last paragraph on page 9. The word ‘special’ was added to condition number 20 in regards events. The honeymoon period is defined as ‘90 days from opening date and signed off by Police Chief,’ was added to condition number 20 after the Board discussed. The Board added conditions 29-32 as follows;

- 29. Subject to DOT Approval.
- 30. Southern swale to be replaced by a rain garden.
- 31. Demolition of existing building may proceed prior to Final Major Site plan approval, provided that the applicant obtains all necessary demolition permits and agrees that such demolition is undertaken at their own risk.
- 32. Applicant shall obtain Board of Health approval for the maintenance and cleaning operations of restaurant.

Mr. Linnus clarified that no action was taken at the previous meeting and that wording should be stricken. The words ‘and to the Objector Weldon Materials’ was also stricken on the last page. Madam chair asked for a motion to approve the Preliminary Site Plan Application. On motion by Mr. Speeney and seconded by Councilman Gibbs.

**VOTE ON THE ACTION TAKEN – April 17, 2025**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Absent</b>	<b>Abstain</b>	<b>Not Voting</b>
Ronald Jubin	X				
Karen Pennett	X				
Robert Gibbs			X		
Tracee Schaefer			X		
Don Speeney	X				
Stephen Pote			X		
Troy Sims	X				
Ellen Spingler	X				
Jennifer Kobliska			X		
Jackie Bodnar	X				
Dustin M. Antonio	X				

VOTE ON THE RESOLUTION – May 27, 2025

NAME	Yes	No	Absent	Abstain	Not Voting
Ronald Jubin	X				
Karen Pennett	X				
Robert Gibbs	X				
Tracee Schaefer	X				
Don Speeney	X				
Stephen Pote	X				
Troy Sims	X				
Ellen Spingler	X				
Jennifer Kobliska			X		
Jackie Bodnar	X				
Dustin M. Antonio	X				

It was noted that if the Applicant wants to come back for Final Site Plan approval, they just have to show the plans to ensure it matched Preliminary approval and the Board would then vote.

**CASE NO.: PB 24-01/PB19-01; Bonnie Burn Redevelopers Urban Renewal, LLC**

ADDRESS: 275 Bonnie Burn

BLOCK: 7403, Lots 5

RB ZONE

Expiration: 06/26/2025

[Click Here](#) for Plans. The Applicant seeks to modify the Club House designs which were previously approved. The revised Club House design fully complies with all items of the applicable ordinance 28-420.I, 28-420.J and 28-240.F. The overall form and footprint remain unchanged. While the materials remain unchanged, brick, fiber cement and metal accent, they have been used in a different manor. We have added a metal accent element to the front and sides of the clubhouse that accentuates the two-story nature of the space beyond. This metal accent feature wraps the sides of the façade at the first story. In addition, we moved the location of the corner bay element from the right side of the front elevation to the left side and changed the color of the fiber cement siding from white to wood tone. We felt it was necessary to make an architectural statement at the entry to the project and these forms provide that statement. A vertical siding element was added to all sides of the building in lieu of the horizontal siding for all sides. Some of the windows were adjusted to accommodate the interior floor plan. Additionally, the partial basement space now matches the footprint of the level above increasing the overall square footage by 1,529 sf. The residential buildings remain unchanged.

Next, Nicole Dory, the Applicant’s counsel approached the podium to provide background on the application. The architect Jack Raker from Minno & Wasko Architect and Planners, who modified the Club House, was on hand and sworn in to provide testimony. Mr. Raker presented the original colorized submitted drawings and the revised renderings, Sheet A04 dated 12/13/2024. Mr. Raker said they utilized the same materials except for one which was a copper color would now be gray. Some additional brick was added and windows were moved around to accommodate some floor plan changes. The Club House is the same foot print, but it grew in square footage. The

renderings appear different since they were done 2 years apart and done by different interns. There was some confusion from the board since the renderings appeared to be completely different and different colors. [Exhibit A1](#) was entered into evidence sheet, A18 dated 06/10/2021. This sheet was submitted during the original application PB19-01. Mr. Raker discussed the need to make a larger package room since more people are ordering online. Additionally, fitness centers are becoming more important so they increased the size of the workout room and moved it into the basement. Some co-working space was added where the fitness center originally was on the upper level.

Ms. Bodnar asked where the additional square footage would be located? Mr. Raker pointed out the lower level is being excavated further to increase more usable building area. A grand staircase was also added going down into the basement. Mr. Sims asked if an elevator would be available (yes). Mr. Speeney asked if the expanded use could still be used with the original renderings (no, it's irrelevant). Mr. Raker explained that the marketing team wanted to update the presence of the building. Mr. Speeney mentioned he liked the original drawings better, while Madam Chair pointed out the materials were the same just a difference in renderings. The Board discussed the differences in the renderings. Mr. Raker pointed out the new floor plan compliments the updated programing in the building and the materials were the same, just used in a different manner. Mayor Jubin inquired about the excavation that would happen in the basement and if blasting would be required? Mr. Raker mentioned if blasting would occur it would be mitigated from the stacked layout of the buildings, but he did not have more information. Ms. Pennet asked why the windows were removed in the bottom, right floor level area? That is where the private dining area will be located and a stairwell.

Madam Chair opened it to the public for questions, hearing none, public questions were closed. Ms. Dory ran through some of the questions in the professional reports with Mr. Raker. A condition was requested from the professionals that updated civil plans would be submitted to reflect any changes approved. This was acceptable to the Applicant who would also comply with both March 3<sup>rd</sup> memos from Mr. Healey and Bright View Engineering. Mr. Healey asked about the roofing materials and other materials that would be utilized, but the colors would be the same with some different accents? (yes). Mr. Healey asked if the new architecture would still flow with the other proposed buildings (yes).

Mr. Speeney agreed with the updated floor plans being maximized, but disagreed with the new colors being presented. Ms. Dory asked for a condition of approval for Mr. Raker to present to the Board the materials. The Board discussed the coloring and renderings again. Madam Chair stated the Board could not deny the application due to changes in architecture. With that said, Madam Chair made a motion to approve PB24-01 with conditions that Applicant will provide true color renderings, a material board, and any required blasting information for lower-level excavation. Motion was seconded by Councilman Gibbs. Ms. Bodnar asked in regards to drainage if anything changed? Ms. Dory replied that the Civil Engineer will submit revised plans to the Board as a condition for approval. Councilman Gibbs requested a summary of what will changed from the Civil Engineer.

ROLL CALL:

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	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 - Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye

The Chair opened it up to the public for any comments, hearing none, it was closed.

Madam Chair mentioned the next meeting will be Monday, June 9<sup>th</sup> for the Fair Share Housing Plan at 7pm along with a presentation from Mr. Healey.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00pm. The next Regular Meeting will be Tuesday, June 17<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Respectfully Submitted,



Catherine Furlan  
Board Clerk