

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
September 16th, 2025 | 7:30 PM
15 Mountain Blvd., Watchung, NJ 07069
Adopted On: 10/14/2025**

CALL TO ORDER: Madam Chair 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 published in the Echoes Sentinel and Courier News. The 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 – (Absent)
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – present	
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman - (Absent)	Mr. Francis P. Linnus, Esq. - present
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – present	Mr. Mark Healey, PP – present
Ms. Karen Pennett – present	Mr. John Jahr, Board Traffic Engineer BE - present
Mr. Stephen Pote – present	Jamie Guarantano, Board Engineer BVE - present
Ms. Jackie Bodnar – present	Ms. Catherine Furlan Board Clerk- present

Madam Chair opened the meeting, noting a quorum was present and asked for waiving of the minutes to be read and for a motion to accept the Regular Meeting Minutes from August 19th, 2025. On motion by Ms. Spingler and seconded by Mr. Speeney. Followed by a unanimous voice vote, all were in favor.

Next, Ms. Spingler read Resolution PB25-R11 Executive Session into the record. Chairwoman noted a date error in the resolution so appropriate changes were made an initialed. Chair sought a motion to accept resolution. On motion by Mayor Jubin seconded by Mr. Antonio.

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	Mr. Dustin Antonio – Aye
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – Aye	Mr. Troy Sims – absent
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – Aye	Ms. Jackie Bodnar – Aye
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman - absent	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye

The Board went into Executive Session at 7:32pm and came out at 7:40pm.

ROLL CALL:

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- present	Mr. Dustin Antonio – present
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – present	Mr. Troy Sims – (Absent)
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – present	
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman - (Absent)	Mr. Francis P. Linnus, Esq. - present
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – present	Mr. Mark Healey, PP – present
Ms. Karen Pennett – present	Mr. John Jahr, Board Traffic Engineer BE - present
Mr. Stephen Pote – present	Jamie Guarantano, Board Engineer BVE - present
Ms. Jackie Bodnar – present	Ms. Catherine Furlan Board Clerk- present

Chair made a motion to direct Planning Board Attorney to continue to represent the Board through the appeal and not to exceed \$10, 000. On motion by Mr. Speeney and seconded by Ms. Pennett.

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	Mr. Dustin Antonio – aye
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – Aye	Mr. Troy Sims – absent
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – Aye	Ms. Jackie Bodnar – Aye
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman - absent	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye

Ms. Spingler read the next item on the agenda, Resolution PB25-R10 Raising Cane’s. Mr. Michael O’Grodnick from Savo, Schalk law firm approached the Board as the Applicant’s Attorney. He inquired about demolition of the site and if the Applicant could proceed? Mr. Linnus confirmed, ‘demo has nothing to do with the resolution’ and they could proceed to submit those permits. Ms. Spingler read into the record PB25-R10 for Final Site Plan Approval for Raising Cane’s.

PB24-02; RAISING CANE’S (Final Site Plan Approval)

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

The Applicant is seeking Final Site Plan approvals to replace the existing +/-8,616 sf Hibachi Grill & Supreme Buffet pad site fronting on Route 22 with a 4,320-sf Raising Cane’s restaurant with a 2-lane drive thru.

Click Access Plans [Click Here](#)

Chairwoman made a motion to adopt Resolution PB25-R10 for Final Site Plan Approval with conditions. Mr. Healey made a comment that on page 4 item #18 should read ‘Borough Attorney’ and not Board Planner. On motion by Mr. Speeney, seconded by Mr. Pote.

Roll Call

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	Mr. Dustin Antonio – not eligible
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – Aye	Mr. Troy Sims – absent
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – Aye	Ms. Jackie Bodnar – Aye
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman - absent	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye

APPLICATIONS:

PB25-01; AMERICAN RECYCLING TECHNOLOGIES (Adjourned 10/14/2025)

1640 Route 22

Block 6101 Lot 5

Zone: HD

Expiration: November 4th, 2025

The Applicant seeks to place a clothing bin in the parking lot of City MD. The proposal would appear to remove two parking spaces. Since the site was the subject of a prior parking variance(s) the removal of these spaces would require a new parking variance. Click Access [Plans Here](#)

Mr. Linnus announced that the application will be carried to the October 14th meeting with no further notice required. Mr. Linnus also mentioned a letter received from the Applicant’s attorney dated August 28th, that they would agree to any further extension of time to act. The time to act on this application is November 4th, 2025. The Board discussed dates and why they post-poned again. Mr. Speeney discussed voting to deny since the applicant is taking so long. The Board discussed. Mayor Jubin and Ms. Bodnar said they had no objections and that recycling is a positive thing. Chair asked for a motion to extend PB25-R1 to expire December 31st, 2025. On motion by Ms. Spingler seconded by Mayor Jubin.

Roll Call

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	Mr. Dustin Antonio – Aye
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – NO	Mr. Troy Sims – absent
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – Aye	Ms. Jackie Bodnar – Aye
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman - absent	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye

Next, Ms. Spingler called the next application PB25-02; Village Super Markets (Shoprite)

PB25-02; Village Supermarkets (Shoprite)

1701 Rt. 22

Block: 6404 Lots: 2.01, 2.02, 2.03, 2.04

Represented by: Michael P. O’Grodnick, Esq.

HD Zone

Expiration Date: December 12th, 2025

Click [Here](#) for Plans. The Applicant proposes two (2) shopping cart storage areas, two (2) floral display areas and a bike rack along the building frontage. Additionally, the applicant seeks to amend a prior variance for 1,668 parking stalls to a new value of 1,666 parking stalls in order to facilitate the construction of four (4) additional handicap accessible parking stalls.

Please note the site plan drawings have been revised to provide two (2) propane tanks 25' from the second entry/exit of the ShopRite.

Mr. O'Grodnick approached and provided background information on the site as it previously came before the board in 2022 for approval. Mr. Linnus commented that he reviewed the notices, found them sufficient and the board has jurisdiction to hear the case. Mr. O'Grodnick reviewed the outdoor seasonal sales and storage that is proposed along with the propane tank exchange and a bike rack. The second component of the application proposes 4 additional ADA or handicapped parking spaces. As a result of the new grading two parking spots would be lost to accommodate the 4 new ADA spots. Mr. O'Grodnick went on to review the parking requirements for the Borough Ordinance. Mr. O'Grodnick entered into evidence exhibit A-1 showing colored photos of Shoprite taken last week and on opening day.

Chairwoman Schaefer commented that the Applicant is coming to the board for approval for items already there and why did they not come to the board before and not after the fact? Mr. O'Grodnick mentioned that other towns consider this retail to be accessory to the retail use. He then called the first witness, Mr. Rob Streker from Bohler Engineering, 30 Independence Blvd, Warren, NJ 07069. He was accepted as an expert in this field as he has appeared before the board many times.

Mr. Streker presented Site Plans Sheet C301 which was previously submitted and dated 8/26/2025. Mr. Streker provided background information on the application from an engineering perspective and variances sought. Mr. Linnus asked if Mr. Streker would be providing testimony on Exhibit A-1 since the attorney can't provide testimony on exhibits. Mr. Streker explained Exhibit A-1 showing seasonal items and how they do not obstruct the sidewalk or doorway. Mr. Streker went on to explain the propane exchange program. Mr. Guarantano from Bright View Engineering asked if the topography shown was prior or after resurfacing? Would the pavement area be expanded around the parking lot stalls? (Yes). Mr. Speeney asked how long the sidewalk is? On the West side 260 feet, and 45 feet on the east side. Mr. Speeney asked if the sidewalk was long? Is it a high traffic sidewalk? Not really, most people drive and walk up. Mr. Speeney expressed concern over the propane exchange and safety with pedestrians and empty tanks. The board went on to discuss how tanks would be returned and sold along with safety. Mr. Streker said signage could be added. Madam chair said empty tanks could be placed in a designated cage or area. Madam Chair asked again by the Applicant came to the board after the fact for outdoor storage. Mr. Streker acknowledged the mistake and apologized.

Ms. Pennet asked if there is walking space under the overhang? No, the carts obstruct the passage way at that area. Would there be a cahier outside for seasonal sales? Yes, during peak

sales times. Mayor Jubin asked if the propane tanks would be far enough away from the entrance (Yes). Mr. Antonio asked about watering of the plants and pooling of water or water run-off? Timing can be looked at and storm water run-off should catch any water. Mr. Speeney asked, not all return tanks are empty and something needs to be done to complete the return tank process. The board went on to discuss the return tank process.

Mr. Nichil Ramachandran, the Applicant’s Planner, was sworn in from Phillips Price and was accepted as an expert in his field. Mr. Ramachandran reviewed the application from a planning perspective and the variances requested, which would enhance the retail environment. Mr. Ramachandran argued that the requests were logical and compliant and de minimis in nature. The parking changes would meet both a C1 and C2 variance requirements. An additional crosswalk would be added along with 4 additional ADA parking spaces, even though 2 regular parking spaces would be lost. In summary the application is in line with the Borough’s Master Plan and promotes a viable retail center. Chair opened it up to the public for questions, hearing none, public comments/questions were closed.

Mr. O’Grodnick approached the board and provided closing remarks, thanking the board. Chair sought a motion to approve Application PB25-02 with the following conditions; propane exchange return case, parking variance, bike rack, propane exchange, outdoor seasonal sales, hoses to be used during off hours, parking spots reduced to 1666, and straight-line striping instead of hairpin striping. Madam Chair directed Frank to draft a resolution, on motion by Mr. Speeney, seconded by Ms. Pennet.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Tracee Schaefer, Chairwoman- Aye	Mr. Dustin Antonio – Aye
Mr. Donald Speeney, Vice Chairman – Aye	Mr. Troy Sims – absent
Mr. Ronald Jubin, Mayor – Aye	Ms. Jackie Bodnar – Aye
Mr. Robert Gibbs, Councilman - absent	Ms. Karen Pennett – Aye
Ms. Ellen Spingler, Secretary – Aye	Mr. Stephen Pote - Aye

Madam Chair thanked Shoprite for everything they have done as she has heard it is a really nice place to go to (and I do plan on going). Thank you!

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:46pm. The next Regular Meeting will be Tuesday, October 14th, 2025 at 7:30pm.

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,



Catherine Furlan
Board Clerk