

READINGTON TOWNSHIP ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT MINUTES
VIRTUAL REGULAR MEETING
May 20, 2021

The Meeting was called to order by Chair Goodwin at 7:30 p.m. stating that the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act have been met and that this meeting had been duly advertised.

CHAIR GOODWIN ANNOUNCED 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, THIS MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED VIRTUALLY FOR ALL BOARD MEMBERS, BOARD PROFESSIONALS, APPLICANT AND APPLICANT'S TEAM, ANY INTERESTED PARTIES AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO VIEW MEETINGS LIVE USING WEBEX WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO "RAISE A HAND" AND CONTRIBUTE WITH VOICE AND VIDEO DURING THE PUBLIC PORTIONS OF THE MEETING. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WHO ARE CALLING IN BY PHONE WILL ALSO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE WHEN CALLED UPON TO SPEAK.

ROLL CALL

Albrecht, C.
Bola, E.
Goodwin, M.
Hendry, D.
Kirk, T.
Mittleman, K.
Maurer, C.
Nees, S.
Tropello, S.

Others Present:

Board Attorney, Steven Warner, Esq., Board Planner, Michael Sullivan, Board Engineer, Rob O'Brien, Board Traffic Engineer, Jay Troutman, Zoning Officer, Christina Schwartz, Construction Official, Angela DeVoe and Board Secretary, Ann Marie Lehberger.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Mittleman moved, and Ms. Albrecht seconded a motion to approve the April 15, 2021, minutes as amended. The motion carried unanimously.

RESOLUTIONS

There were no Resolutions presented.

PUBLIC HEARING

Whitehouse Auto

Appl# ZB20-003 -Block 18 Lot 12 – 378 Route 22 West
Preliminary & Final Site Plan with "D" Variance - Canopy & Sign

Exhibits presented:

Exhibit A-4 Lighting Exhibit dated 5/18/21
Exhibit A-5 Marked up version of Sheet 2 of Site Plan last revised 4/23/21
Exhibit A-6 Marked up version of Sheet 4 of Site Plan last revised 4/23/21
Exhibit A-7 Proposed Buffer Exhibit dated 5/18/21

Exhibit A-8 Proposed Signage Exhibit dated 5/18/21
Exhibit A-9 Well Test Report dated 5/5/21 (6 pages)

Chair Goodwin stated that the Board would continue where they left off at the last meeting in April with questions from the public for Mathew Wilder, the Applicant's engineer.

It was noted that Mr. Wilder was previously sworn and remained under oath. It was also noted that Board Planner, Michael Sullivan, Board Engineer, Rob O'Brien, Zoning Officer, Christina Schwartz, and Construction Official, Angela DeVoe also remained under oath.

Tanya Rohrbach, Old Highway 28, was present and questioned if the freestanding pole lights would remain on after hours. Mr. Wilder explained that, after the close of business, only one of the two pole mounted lights will remain illuminated at a greatly reduced level. Ms. Rohrbach questioned the need for a digital freestanding sign. Mr. Wilder explained that a digital sign is standard for gas stations and noted that only the price of the gas will be internally illuminated.

Referencing Exhibit, A-4, Mr. Wilder described the revisions to the lighting plan. He stated that the proposed freestanding pole lights will be changed from high pressure sodium to LED. He explained that they are designed with a 3,000-kelvin color temperature that will give the most natural white light. Regarding the canopy lighting, Mr. Wilder explained that based on their investigation of what is available on the market, they are proposing two options for the lighting. The first option is 3,000-degree kelvin lights that protrude approximately one to one and a half inches from the bottom of the proposed canopy. The second option is 4,000-degree kelvin lights that are flush mounted to the proposed canopy.

The Board questioned if the freestanding pole light on the easterly side would be reduced in intensity by 50% as discussed at the last hearing. Mr. Wilder confirmed that the light intensity level would be cut in half and would not have a negative impact on surrounding properties.

In response to a question of the Board, Mr. Wilder stated that the proposed light poles are 15 feet high.

The Board questioned the number of lights that currently exist on the building. Mr. Wilder confirmed that there were 6 lights on the building noting that they are dim lights just to illuminate the front of the building.

In response to a question from Ms. Rohrbach, Mr. Wilder explained that the fuel pumps are not operational when the station is closed.

The Board questioned the kind of landscaping that is proposed on the east near the residential properties. Mr. Wilder stated that they are proposing to plant evergreen trees such as Leland Cypress which grow fast and full. Mr. Wilder also explained that they are proposing to install an 80-foot long cedar fence, 6 feet high with additional landscaping that will provide a good buffer.

Mr. Wilder stated that the Applicant proposes to remove 820 square feet of gravel from the

rear of the building. He confirmed that the remaining gravel area would not be used for additional parking, but rather as a loading zone or staging area for the vehicles being serviced at the auto service building.

The Board questioned where employees park. Mr. Wilder stated that they park in the designated parking spaces on the northern side of the property.

The Board questioned the number of employees on site daily. Mr. Wilder stated that there are generally four employees on site.

Referencing Exhibit, A-7, Mr. Wilder described the buffer area on the property.

Referencing Exhibit, A-8, Mr. Wilder provided the distance that the fuel pumps are setback from the Route 22 right-of-way. Mr. Wilder explained that the rear standalone diesel pump is 72.4 feet from the right of way and is intended to both reduce congestion on the property and prevent accidental mixing of diesel fuel and gasoline. Mr. Wilder also explained that the exhibit has been revised to include the proper sign size calculations noting that in total, there would be approximately 393.03 square feet of signage on the property.

Mr. Wilder stated that they had submitted an OPRA request to the Hunterdon County Health Department but did not obtain any information regarding wells on adjacent properties. He reviewed the results of the testing done on the well on site by the Applicant explaining that the only element that exceeded acceptable standard levels was manganese, which is not a health concern because it exceeded the secondary, and not the primary, contaminant standards.

In response to question of the Board, Mr. Wilder confirmed that no bollards are proposed around the standalone diesel pump. The Applicant agreed to install them as long as it does not interfere with the underground piping.

In response to a question of the Board Engineer, Rob O'Brien, Mr. Wilder confirmed that the existing posts on the freestanding sign would be reused for the new sign.

The Board expressed concern about there being adequate space for large vehicles to safely back up and exit the site when utilizing the standalone diesel pump.

Mr. Wilder testified that, considering the distance between the pump and Route 22, and the average length of a vehicle using diesel fuel, the vehicle will have the ability to reverse and exit the property in a safe and effective manner. The Board's traffic engineer, Jay Troutman was sworn. Mr. Troutman confirmed that due to the location of the pump on the site there would not be any conflict.

Board Engineer, Rob O'Brien asked for the status of the DOT (Department of Transportation) permit. Mr. Wilder explained that the application was not submitted yet due to the ongoing site plan changes.

In response to a question from Board Engineer, Rob O'Brien, Mr. Wilder explained that the site plans will be revised to include additional detail regarding the locations from which

gravel will be removed, the requirement that 5 inches of topsoil be added, and the gasoline pumps will be labeled.

The Board questioned how often the prices on the sign would be changed. Mr. Wilder stated that it would not be more than once per day.

Chair Goodwin opened the public portion of the meeting for questions of Mr. Wilder.

Tanya Rohrbach, Old Highway 28, was sworn and questioned if all large vehicles using the standalone diesel pump would need to back up. Mr. Wilder stated that that it would depend on where the vehicle pulls in, but it is likely that the larger vehicles would need to back up to pull out. Ms. Rohrbach also expressed concern about the safety of the standalone diesel pump. Mr. Wilder stated that they would work with the Township Engineer to ensure that the pump is protected from any vehicle strikes. Ms. Rohrbach questioned what the distance of the nearest pump to her property line was prior to the installation of the standalone diesel fuel pump. Mr. Wilder stated that the closest pump was 97 feet from the eastern property line and the stand-alone pump is currently 58 feet from the property line. Ms. Rohrbach also stated that she has seen cars parked in the gravel area.

Mr. Wilder provided planning testimony and reviewed the variances and exceptions being sought by the Applicant as follows:

Variances

- §148-16.E(d) Minimum front yard setback (canopy, new pumps, freestanding sign)
- §148-18.A Expansion of Existing Nonconforming Use
- §148-52.B Fence height
- §148-114.Y Prohibited Freestanding Sign (Changeable Copy)
- §148-116.9 Prohibited Freestanding, Canopy, and Pump Signs (Commercial Signs in Residential Zone)

Exceptions

- §148-63.A Minimum residential buffer.
- §148-66.K(6) Street trees. §148-67.B Lighting levels
- §148-67.D High pressure sodium light
- §148-70.A.(1) Parking area screening
- §148-70.A.(3) Parking area shade trees
- §148-70.A.(7) Parking area plantings

Mr. Wilder explained that the changes to the site will improve the aesthetics, reduce light spillage, reduce the freestanding sign height, and increase safety on the site. He explained that the proposed canopy will provide protection for employees and patrons from the elements and provide necessary lighting. Mr. Wilder noted that the gas station has been in operation for over 70 years without any issues and stated that in his opinion the proposal would not result in substantial impairment of the Master Plan or Zoning Ordinance because the proposal constitutes an upgrade to an existing fuel service station and will bring it up to current standards.

Board Planner, Michael Sullivan reviewed the two lighting options proposed by the

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Hendry moved, and Mr. Tropello seconded, a motion to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Marie Lehberger
Zoning Board Secretary