

READINGTON TOWNSHIP PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
VIRTUAL REGULAR MEETING
February 22, 2021

The Meeting was called to order by Chair Monaco at 7:00 p.m. stating that the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act have been met and that this meeting had been duly advertised.

CHAIR MONACO 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

Board Members in Attendance:

Albanese, J.

Allen, J.

Cook, J.

Duffy, E.

Filler, C.

Fort, B.

John, C.

Monaco, R.

Rohrbach, T.

Hindle, J.

Board Members Absent

Mueller, A.

Others Present:

Attorney Kathryn Razin for Board Attorney Jonathan Drill, Esq., Board Planner Emily Goldman, Board Engineer Rob O'Brien, Construction Official Angela DeVoe and Board Secretary Ann Marie Lehberger

MINUTES

Ms. Fort, Chair Monaco, Ms. Allen and Mr. Albanese abstained

Ms. Filler moved, and Ms. Duffy seconded a motion to approve the February 8, 2021 minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

RESOLUTIONS

There were no resolutions presented for Board consideration.

PUBLIC HEARING

Branchburg Route 22 LLC (Verano)

Appl# PB19-011- B 14 Lot 49, 3576 Route 22

Preliminary & Final Major Site Plan- Cannabis Grow Facility

Attorney Frank Regan was present on behalf of the applicant.

The following individuals were present and sworn in for the applicant:

Ted Bayer, applicant's engineer

Arie Henry, construction project manager for the applicant

Paul Psenka, applicant's architect

Norm Dotti, applicant's acoustical engineer

Chris Fotopoulos, executive vice president for Verano

Board Planner Emily Goldman, Board Engineer Rob O'Brien and Construction Official Angela DeVoe were also sworn.

Mr. Regan provided some background on the application explaining that the Applicant had received site plan waiver approval in December of 2019 for some exterior improvements in Phase I of the project and is present this evening requesting Preliminary & Final Major Site Approval with variances for Phase II. Mr. Reagan noted that the Applicant will agree to the following items as noted in the reports of the Board's Professionals:

- Open the access point off Route 22 and utilize it as a two-way access in and out of site.
- Address discharge from chillers and get inspection of the existing underground stormwater system.
- Remove existing pylon size.
- Screening of loading area
- Additional plantings in off street parking areas
- Increase plantings in buffer area.
- Provide lighting plan.

Arie Henry, construction project manager for the applicant provided testimony as follows: The site is currently in use and the intent of the proposed improvements are to complete the buildout of the entire facility. There are 30-40 employees currently on site and they expect 100 employees on a rotating basis once the facility is complete. The hours of operation are from Monday-Saturday from 7:00 am to 5:30 pm with a minimal crew on Sundays. There are security personnel throughout the facility and a high-tech security alarm system with remote access. The storage trailers at the rear of the site are temporary for construction. There is a 10,000-gallon graywater underground storage tank proposed at the rear of the site to handle the runoff from the grow rooms and the discharge from the reverse osmosis system that will be emptied weekly. As to odor, no outside air is introduced into the room and any current odor is likely due to the ongoing construction which is not normal activity on site.

The Board questioned what other odor remediation has been done on any other sites. Mr. Henry

stated that he is not aware of any issues at other sites but noted that there are steps that can be taken to remediate if necessary.

The Board questioned if a double door system could be used and what can be done if odor persists after construction is completed. Mr. Henry confirmed that if there are any issues with odor once the site is up and running that they will be willing to discuss other options to remediate.

The applicant agreed to a condition that they will commit to work with the Township regarding odor mitigation if it persists once construction is completed.

The Board questioned if the facility had air scrubbers. Mr. Henry stated that it did not.

In response to a question from the Board, Mr. Regan confirmed that the applicant will open and utilize the main entrance on Route 22 as a two-way access and agree to work with the Board professionals regarding landscaping.

Board Engineer Rob O'Brien questioned if the access off Island Road would still be used. Mr. Regan stated that it would remain open and available for use.

The Board expressed concern about the use of Island Road for commercial use.

Board Engineer Rob O'Brien questioned what was proposed for the existing greenhouse area from the previous Wal Mart. Mr. Henry stated that there are no current plans for the existing greenhouse.

The Board questioned how the facility is monitored overnight. Mr. Henry stated that there is a full alarm system and two monitoring firms that monitor the site 24/7.

Chair Monaco opened the public portion of the meeting for Mr. Henry.

Dave Forman, 4 Sophie Street was sworn and expressed concern about the odor explaining that he lives across the street and can smell the odor.

Deanna King, 2 Island Road expressed concern about odor and questioned if the alarms going off during the night can be turned off. Ms. King also questioned if there was anything that could be done about trucks idling on Island Road overnight. Mr. Henry stated that he was not aware of alarms going off at night and explained that he would direct all construction vehicle traffic to the parking lot on site.

Construction Official Angela DeVoe noted that complaints to the Township go through the Zoning Officer.

There was a discussion on what the process would be if there continued to be a problem with odor once construction is complete and the facility was up and running,

The Board questioned how the alarm system worked. Mr. Henry explained that if the alarm is activated, the security personnel are notified.

Chris Fotopoulos, executive vice president for Verano was present and explained that once the alarm is triggered, the local municipal police and the general manager of the facility are notified. He also noted that the alarm must be deactivated,

The Board questioned if the alarm was outward facing. Mr. Fotopoulos confirmed that it was.

The Board questioned if trucks were parking overnight on Island Road. Mr. Henry stated that he was not aware of any trucks parking on Island Road.

It was noted that once the entrance on Route 22 is opened, it may help alleviate the trucks from accessing the site on Island Road.

Construction Official Angela DeVoe questioned if there will be gates at the Route 22 entrance and if a knox box would be installed. Mr. Henry confirmed that there would be a gate and a knox box.

Board Planner Emily Goldman noted that a detail of the proposed gate should be provided.

Ted Bayer, PE, the applicant's engineer was accepted by the Board as an expert witness. Referencing the site plans that were submitted with the application, Mr. Bayer gave an overview of the existing site and provided testimony as follows: The main entrance on Route 22 will now be open for both in and out traffic from the site. The existing farther west exit on Route 22 will be closed. The Island Road entrance provides easy access for emergency vehicles to get to the site and should remain open. There are several mechanical equipment pieces such as chillers and air handlers proposed around the building that are required for the grow operation. A 10,000-gallon sub-surface holding tank is proposed in the back of the building. A new septic system is proposed that has been approved to the Township Board of Health. A generator is proposed in the back of the building. There is an existing water storage tank and on site well. A number of the existing parking spaces will be removed in the front of the building so that a paved fire lane can be added. A vinyl fence is proposed to screen the mechanical equipment from the residential zone across the street. The trees in the parking area will be removed and replaced. An additional screening buffer will be provided along Island Road. Screening and buffering will be provided at the entrance as needed. A lighting plan will be provided as requested by the Board professionals. Mr. Bayer described the stormwater system at the site. He explained that all deliveries to and from the site will be made in vans so there will be no tractor trailer traffic coming in off Island Road. Mr. Bayer confirmed that there are more than adequate parking spaces on site.

The Board questioned how the 10,000-gallon tank would operate. Mr. Henry explained that all the underground drainage from the grow rooms as well as discharge from the reverse osmosis equipment will run into the tanks. He also explained that there are sensors and alarms to alert them when in it needs to be emptied.

The Board questioned when the generator would be used. Mr. Henry explained that it is an emergency generator when there is loss of power.

The Board questioned the hours that the air handlers would be in use. Mr. Henry stated that they ran 24 hours a day.

Board Planner Emily Goldman questioned if there was a consideration to remove more of the parking spaces to comply with the impervious coverage requirements. Mr. Bayer stated that they did not consider that since it was an existing condition.

The applicant agreed to eliminate some additional parking spaces along Route 22. Board Emily Goldman also noted other areas on site that should be looked at as well,

Board Engineer Rob O'Brien questioned if employees would use the Island Road entrance. Mr. Bayer explained that employees would be parking in the front lot on Route 22. Mr. Bayer also confirmed that he would provide a detail to the ramp at the loading dock.

The Board questioned if there would be a pedestrian pathway for those employees walking to work. Mr. Bayer stated that there was nothing proposed.

The Board requested some detail on lighting. Mr. Bayer explained that they would provide a lighting plan but noted that they are planning on updating the existing poles with LED.

Chair Monaco opened the public portion of the meeting for questions of Mr. Bayer.

Joseph King, 2 Island Road questioned the buffer on Island Road noting that the existing fence needs repair. Mr. Bayer explained that plantings would be added, and the fence would be repaired. Mr. King stated that the gate to the entrance on Island Road prohibits trucks from entering the site. Mr. Henry agreed that the applicant could open the gate temporarily during construction so the construction trucks can enter the site instead of remaining on Island Road.

Paul Psenka, the applicant's architect was accepted by the Board as an expert witness. Referencing the architectural plans that were submitted with the application, Mr. Psenka provided testimony as follows: There are several self-contained rooms for growing, trimming, harvesting, drying and packaging. The individual rooms are sealed off from each other to prevent cross contamination. The building entrances have vestibules in the front and the back. Once the building is up and running all the doors will be sealed and employees will enter and exit through the front entrance. There are no plans to use the existing greenhouse on the property.

Chair Monaco opened the public portion of the meeting for Mr. Psenka. There were no questions.

Norm Dotti, the applicant's acoustical engineer was accepted by the Board as an expert witness. Mr. Dotti provided testimony as follows: An assessment was done of the existing sound levels at the site over a three-day period. Information was collected on all the pieces of equipment that will be used on the site. Calculations were done assuming all equipment would be running at

night. As a result of the assessment, a problem area was found with the condensers along the western side. A sound barrier wall is recommended around the condensers to remedy the problem. Mr. Dotti confirmed that sound from the facility without the condensers with everything running complies with the State noise regulation.

The Board questioned how the sound barrier would work. Mr. Dotti explained that the recommended sound barrier contains a material that acts as a sound absorber.

Board Planner Emily Goldman noted that the sound barrier is not shown on the plans.

In response to a question of the Board, Mr. Dotti confirmed that there is not a need for sound attenuation in front of the building.

Board Engineer Rob O'Brien questioned if the generator was included in the analysis. Mr. Dotti stated that it was not included but based on his experience it will be well under the limit. Mr. Henry confirmed it would be a diesel generator.

The Board questioned if there would be sound testing done after the site is up and running to ensure compliance. The applicant agreed to do sound testing after everything is installed and the site is up and running.

Board Planner Emily Goldman noted that the 12-foot-high sound barrier wall will require variance relief. Ms. Goldman also noted that the color of the wall should blend into the color of the building.

Chair Monaco stated that a detail of the proposed sound barrier wall should be provided.

Chair Monaco opened the public portion of the meeting for questions of Mr. Dotti.

Deanna King, 2 Island Road questioned a high-pitched sound that they have heard coming from the site. Mr. Dotti stated that he did not know what that sound was but noted that it should not be coming from the HVAC equipment.

In response to a question from the Board Planner, Mr. Psenka stated that the purpose of the bollards is to protect the equipment from the vehicular traffic.

The Board discussed the applicant's proposal to install a vinyl fence in front of the building instead of the wall required by ordinance to screen the HVAC equipment to the residential zone. The Board agreed that a fence with landscaping would be an acceptable alternative.

Board Planner Emily Goldman reviewed the variances needed. It was discussed that the applicant should also look at reducing the impervious coverage.

Board Attorney Katie Razin reviewed the conditions that were discussed.

It was announced that the application would be carried to the meeting on March 22, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. The Applicant agreed to an extension of time through March 31, 2021. It was noted that it would be a virtual meeting and there will be new log in information for the meeting that will be provided on the agenda that will be posted on the Township website. It was also noted that those without computer and internet access can call the Board Secretary directly to obtain the call-in information. No additional notice will be provided.

OTHER BUSINESS

Discussion-Stormwater Ordinance

Ms. Rohrbach noted a typographical error and Chair Monaco noted some minor edits.

Ms. Fort moved, and Ms. Duffy seconded, a motion to send the ordinance Township Committee for their review and consideration. The roll call vote follows:

Member	Motion	2 nd	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent	Not Eligible	Recused
Albanese			X					
Allen			X					
Cook			X*					
Filler			X					
Fort	X		X					
John			X					
Mueller						X		
Duffy		X	X					
Monaco			X					
Rohrbach Alternate #1			X					
Hindle Alternate #2			X					

*Mr. Cook was present but not audible.

Chair Monaco, Mr. Albanese, Ms. Allen and Ms. Fort recused themselves and left the meeting. Vice-Chair Liz Duffy took over the meeting.

Aviation Planning Consultant- Nick Brown- Crawford, Murphy & Tilly

Vice-Chair Duffy explained that the Board Planner recommended that the Board retain an aviation consultant for review and advice in the realm of airport planning and operations related to development applications related to Solberg Hunterdon Airport due to the highly technical nature of airport applications.

Ms. Filler moved, and Mr. John seconded, a motion to adopt the resolution to appoint Nick Brown from Crawford Murphy & Tilly as the Planning Board’s aviation planning consultant for 2021. The roll call vote follows:

Member	Motion	2nd	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent	Not Eligible	Recused
Albanese								X
Allen								X
Cook			X*					
Filler	X		X					
Fort								X
John		X	X					
Mueller						X		
Duffy			X					
Monaco								X
Rohrbach Alternate #1			X					
Hindle Alternate #2			X					

*Mr. Cook was present but not audible.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Filler moved, and Mr. John seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
 Ann Marie Lehberger
 Planning Board Secretary