

**MINUTES OF THE MARCH 15, 2022
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
HELD AT 4:47 P.M.
ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

Call to Order

The March 15, 2022 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:47 p.m. This meeting was held as a virtual meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance

Open Public Meetings Statement

Chairman Navatto, Jr. reported the meeting had been duly advertised in accordance with Open Public Meetings Act as follows:

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., and the Emergency Remote Meeting Protocol for Local Public Bodies N.J.A.C. 5:39-1.1 through 1.7, adequate notice of this meeting has been provided. The date, time and virtual meeting information for this meeting was published in The Star-Ledger and the Courier News. The agenda and the virtual meeting information was also posted on the County Planning Board website.

Roll Call

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr., Chairman
Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair
Chris Kelly, Member
Al Ellis, Member
Erika Inocencio, Member
Sami Shaban, Member
Commissioner Paul Drake
Adam Slutsky, alternate for Matt Loper, Recording Secretary
Marina Stinely, Esq. covering for Joseph DeMarco, Esq., County Counsel

Absent

Commissioner Director Robinson
Matt Loper, Secretary
Ashok Rakhit, 1st Alternate
Maria Tapia-Burch

Also Present from Staff

Walter Lane, Director, Office of Planning Policy and Economic Development
Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Transportation Planner
James Ruggieri, Principal Community Planner

Tom Boccino, Supervising Planner, Preservation
Kaitlin Bundy, Manager, Cultural & Heritage
Kate Katzer, Principal Planner
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager

Approval of February 15, 2022 Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Chairman Navatto, Jr. asked for a motion to approve the minutes of February 15, 2022 Planning Board Meeting. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by Michael Giordano. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Discussion/Presentation Items:

North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) Update

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane introduced Lois Goldman, Director, Long Range Transportation Planning from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). Ms. Goldman provided the County Planning Board a broad overview of the organization structure of the NJTPA. She also detailed the various planning initiatives underway at the NJTPA as well as numerous planning projects the County is leading. As part of her presentation, she summarized the NJTPA's new Long Range Transportation Plan: Plan 2050. A copy of the presentation is attached to the minutes. Chairman Navatto thanked Ms. Goldman her presentation.

Planning Director's Report

Director Lane provided an overview of work underway in the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development. He briefed the Board on the following items:

- He reminded the Board about the Special Planning Board on March 30th at 4:45pm. A Public Hearing will be conducted at this meeting to begin the process to adopt the Preservation Plan as an element of the County Master Plan.
- The first quarterly meeting of 2022 of the Complete County Committee 2.0 Meeting was held. There were over twenty (20) attendees and he thanked Kenneth Wedeen for his great work with the Committee.
- Director Lane provided a brief overview of Assembly Bill 1294 which would authorize the conversion of certain office parks and retail centers to mixed use developments if the existing development (50,000 square feet of office space or 15,000 square feet of retail space) has a greater than 40% vacancy rate. The proposed Bill passed out of committee on March 7th. The previous version of bill never made it out of committee in last legislative session. Staff will monitor this proposed legislation.
- The next Planning Partners Forum will be held on March 23rd at 8am via Zoom. NJ Future/Jersey Waterworks' Water Risk and Equity Mapping Tool will be the featured presentation. Over twenty attendees have registered for the Forum.

- Rutgers University's Bloustein School reached out to the County to be a sponsor of a Studio Design class that will undertake a "Blue Sky" Planning Study of the West Trenton Rail Line to support the reactivation of rail service on this line.
- Director Lane announced the new Deputy Director of the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development, Angela Knowles, will be starting on March 21st. He stated she is an excellent addition to the team and is looking forward to working with her. Chairman Navatto welcomed her to the Board.
- Director Lane stated this is Principal Community Planner James Ruggieri's last meeting since he will be retiring from the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development after fifteen (15) years of service to Somerset County at the end of March. He thanked James for his excellent work and stated Mr. Ruggieri is true public servant and is working diligently to wrap up his work assignments before he retires. Many members of the Board thanked Mr. Ruggieri for his great work over the years.

Action Items/Informational Items

March 2022 Land Development Report and Approval of the February 2022 First Time Submissions

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, referred to the report in the Planning Board Packet. At the March 9, 2022 meeting of the County Planning Board Land Development Committee, the Committee reviewed two information items as well as the first-time submissions for the month of February 2022. It was noted that there was no quorum for the meeting. Therefore, there were no official actions taken.

33 Second Street, Raritan

James Ruggieri reported that the 33 Second Street project, located in Raritan, involves converting a three-story 14,460 square foot office building into 16 residential one and two-bedroom apartments and increasing the existing 26 space onsite parking lot by 2 spaces. The .69-acre property is located on the corner of Second Street and Church Street (both local roads). Two points of access are proposed to provide a full movement driveway on Church Street and an egress only driveway on Second Street, respectively. To the south is the Raritan Municipal Building. The building's current or most recent use is office related. Bernard Navatto report that it was originally a school.

The only issue involving the County is recycling. The County Planning Board issued its report on February 25, 2022, indicating that if the developers want Somerset County to collect recyclables it must design the dumpster enclosures to facilitate two 4'x4' dumpsters for every 20 residential units. The enclosures will have to be positioned in a manner that facilitates collection with front loading County vehicles.

A cash contribution of \$2,000 shall be submitted to the County to cover the cost of the recycling dumpsters to be provided by Somerset County. Alternatively, if the intent is to have all recycling and garbage collected by a private hauler, the ultimate owner or property management company is to provide a written statement indicating that recycling will be collected by a private hauler and this complex will not participate in the Somerset County's Solid Waste Management Program.

The County included in our review report that the existing building is referenced in the Somerset County Cultural Resource Survey Volume II and, according to the Survey, is considered not eligible for the National and New Jersey Register of Historic Places. This project shows how a historic building in the heart of Raritan Borough, just two blocks from downtown and three blocks from Raritan Train Station, is being repurposed.

205 Charis LLC (Granetz Building), Somerville

James Ruggieri also reported on the 205 Charis LLC project in Somerville. He stated that this project involves the existing four-story commercial/office building known as the Granetz Building consisting of almost 48,000 square feet. The building's current use includes ground floor retail with the upper three levels partly occupied by a dance studio, spa, driving school and office space. The .63-acre property is located on West Main Street (New Jersey Route 28) and Somerset Street (County Route 626) at the intersection with West End Avenue in Somerville. The property also has side frontage along South Doughty Avenue and New Street (both local roads). The site is located within walking distance of the Somerville Senior housing on West End Avenue and is a few blocks from the Somerville Train Station, and downtown shopping.

The applicant is proposing to convert the building into a different mixed-use type building from commercial and office use to adult daycare and residential uses consisting of converting the ground floor into an 11,974 square foot adult daycare center and the second, third and fourth floors into 27 one and two-bedroom market-rate apartments. The applicant is also making building façade improvements. Parking is available on-site with additional parking available at a nearby parking lot located at West Veterans Memorial Drive and New Street (both local roads). As part of the project the applicant is restriping both parking lots.

The County Planning Board issued its review report on January 27, 2022 deeming the application incomplete. Our requirements include restriping the crosswalk across Somerset Street to meet County standards and installing ADA-compliant curb ramps; additional requirements include labeling Somerset Street as County Route 626, providing the street addresses of the various utilities, and possible right-of-way dedication. Because this is a mixed-use project, we will not be providing recycling collection. Included in our report that this site (201-211 West Main Street; a.k.a. the Granetz Building) is a contributing resource to the eligible Somerville historic district as per Survey of Somerville prepared by Heritage Studies (1992); therefore, any changes to the exterior of the building should be compatible with the existing historic structure and the nature of the neighborhood. Bernard Navatto did not participate in any discussion concerning this project.

First Time Submissions

The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of February 2022. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 24 submissions. There were three (3) new lots proposed and two (2) lots created. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 251,010 square feet of non-residential building space proposed as well as 71 multi-family units. There was \$1,200 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board.

Bernard Navatto, Jr., did not participate in any discussion or take any action on the Immaculate High School Rooftop Solar project or the Somerville Multi Family, LLC project in Somerville. As indicated

earlier, since a quorum was not present at the scheduled meeting of the Land Development Committee, the full County Planning Board must approve the first-time submissions for the month of February. A motion was made by Al Ellis and seconded by Michael Giordano. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Somerset County Circulation Plan Project Update

Supervising Planner Kenneth Wedeen reported staff has been working to address comments from the NJTPA received during February 2022 on the draft Somerset County Circulation Element Update (CEU) Request for Proposals. Staff emailed a final set of revisions to the NJTPA on March 4th. Once the final RFP is approved by NJTPA staff, County Planning and Purchasing Department staff will work to advertise the RFP during March 2022. He also provided a brief status report on the recently completed Somerset County Roadway Corridor Safety Study.

State Plan Update

Director Lane provided a brief report on the status of municipal plan endorsement efforts. The Borough of Bound Brook authorized the submission of their Municipal Self-Assessment Report. A good number of our towns in engaged in the Plan Endorsement process. Staff has been working with the Regional Center municipalities to prepare an extensive summary of all the planning work that has occurred since the Regional Center municipalities obtained Plan Endorsement Designation in 2013. A meeting with representatives of the Office of Planning Advocacy to discuss the Regional Center's redesignation is scheduled for later in March.

Wastewater Update

Director Lane provided a brief update on the County Wastewater Management Plan (WMP). He reported he had spoken to staff at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) regarding our pending request to extend the approval of our Future Wastewater Service Area Map (FWSA). Our request had been submitted to June of 2021. NJDEP informed the County that the extension was going to be denied. NJDEP staff assured the County that there were no negative impacts (sewer moratoriums, site-specific amendment moratoriums and alike) from this denial. NJDEP could initiate mapping changes but indicated they do not have the staffing to do so and did not foresee doing so if they did have adequate staffing.

Director Lane reported he and County Counsel met with representatives from the Fox Hollow project to discuss their potential site-specific amendment request. The applicant has not submitted a formal application to NJDEP as this time. Without a formal submission, the County Planning Board does not have to provide a comment letter at this time. After Director Lane explained the County's position on the project, the applicant asked if they could submit additional information for the County to consider before taking any action. He informed the applicants any additional information would be welcomed. Director Lane stated he would apprise the Board once additional information is submitted by the applicant. He stated there has not been any movement on the other site-specific amendments requests that have previously been discussed.

Public Comments

Chairman Navatto opened the meeting to the Public. There being no comments, the meeting was closed to the Public.

Committee Reports

Committee Reports were included in the Packet.

Next meeting Dates: March 30, 2022 @ 4:45 Special Meeting (Virtual) and April 15, 2022 @ 4:45 (virtual)

Adjournment

There being no further business before the Board, Chairman Navatto, Jr., asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by Michael Giordano. A Voice Vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary