

RARITAN PLANNING & ZONING BOARD  
22 First Street  
Raritan, New Jersey

Minutes of April 26, 2006

Present: Mayor A. Hudak  
Mr. T. Granahan  
Councilman V. Laggini  
Mr. A. LoPresti  
Mr. F. Ruffa  
Mr. W. Salerno  
Mr. P. Strub  
Absent: Mr. R. Miller

Also Present: S. Rubright, Esq.  
S. Schrek – Schoor DePalma  
C. Neighbor – Schoor DePalma

(Prior to the meeting, Brent Krasner from the Somerset County Planning Board and Diana Saltel, Planning Consultant presented a powerpoint program about the Strategic Master Plan for the Regional Center. They handed out surveys and asked Board members to prioritize the outstanding projects listed on the Implementation Plan Matrix. D. Thomas will collect these at the May meeting and forward to B. Krasner.)

The meeting was called to order at 7:37 P.M. by Chairman T. Granahan.

On a motion by A. Hudak, seconded by V. Laggini, the March 22, 2006 minutes were unanimously approved with two abstentions by P. Strub and F. Ruffa.

T. Granahan advised that no new testimony would be heard after 10:30 P.M.

The first order of old business was to continue hearing testimony for a minor subdivision for Enzo Padovani on Quick Ave., Block 33, Lot 14. Katherine Howes of Howes and Howes, 26 Anderson Street, Raritan, attorney for the applicant, asked the Board to consider a C-2 variance. The application was changed from a two-family home to a one-family. S. Rubright explained the variance change. Because the property doesn't meet with the ordinance requirements, a variance is needed. With a C-1 variance, the applicant would have to show a physical hardship that was unique with this property. A C-2 variance is a looser standard in that the applicant just has to show that there is some benefit in granting this relief. With both variances, the applicant has to prove that granting the variance would not be detrimental to the zone plan and not have a negative affect on the neighborhood. The attorney for the applicant is not withdrawing the C-1 request. Testimony will continue pertaining to the C-2 variance.

Joseph Rosina, professional planner from Stires and Associates, 43 High Street, Somerville, said the proposed project is in a residential area. It is a transitional property in that it is between a commercial area and residential zone. The buffer zone is only 10 ft. when the ordinance calls for 20 ft. The site is located in an R-4 zone. The proposed plan will not meet all of the ordinance requirements. The changes since last month are the applicant's request for a minor sub-division to construct a one-family home. The existing home will remain on the lot. The new plan is more pleasing. In addition, the lot coverage improved. There is a one car garage included in the plan. The lot frontage is 49 ½ ft, which is similar to other homes in the area. It will enhance the aesthetics of the area and increase the value of other homes. This project fits in with the Master

Plan, which encourages the building of homes on vacant and underutilized lots. Raritan is almost fully built-up. Most development will occur in underutilized sites. The sub-division scale should be monitored. The single family home is a significant alternative to the duplexes on Raritan Avenue. C. Neighbor explained that duplexes are actually a more efficient use of space because each unit has only one side yard.

J. Rosina explained that 77% of the lots in the neighborhood are non-conforming in either width or area. Many of these sub-divisions have been approved in recent years (about 10 yrs.). There is one that was approved in 2002. T. Granahan asked which property that was. J. Rosina advised it was block 35, lot 21.01 and 21.02 on Raritan Avenue. T. Granahan said that was an existing duplex with dual ownership. It is disingenuous to use this as an example because it is not equal. They weren't granted because it was new construction. J. Rosina added that the applicant is consistent with what the Board has been approving. T. Granahan said you are using outdated events which don't reflect the current Master Plan and where the Board is going. You are defining it as a transitional property and, in my own opinion, because it is in a buffer zone, it is better not to subdivide it. You come off the highway and visually more green eases you into the residential area. The intent of the Master Plan is to protect and keep as is, and your argument is up for interpretation. You are saying it is an underutilized property, and the fact that it's conforming means it's not. When we talk about redevelopment, we mean knock it down and put better up, not squeeze more in. It is a beautiful piece of property right now.

W. Salerno said a single fits better than a two-family. We have granted quite a few sub-divisions on substandard lots in R-4 zones. I don't see it as a detrement. It is an improvement. V. Laggini didn't see any detrement. D. Thomas asked where the other house of this style exists. E. Padovani said it is the same as the Carra house on Bell Avenue. D. Thomas said using the Master Plan refutes your case and doesn't support it. The property is not underutilized and I actually like the look of the current property. P. Strub said the case has not been made that this will enhance the community and benefit the Borough. As a Board member who spent the last year and a half reviewing the Master Plan, I think we have to uphold it and not keep changing it all the time. A. Hudak said the single-family house will enhance the neighborhood. F. Ruffa said the house is attractive, but I don't feel that the footage requirement is there. A. LoPresti said the proposed house would be a good buffer for the unattractive property next door, and maybe everybody will follow suit and improve their homes.

E. Padovani explained the house as a two-story colonial. We will put natural stone underneath the porch. It has four bedrooms and 2 ½ baths. The garage is attached. Everything fits just right. E. Padovani didn't know the square footage of the house. The plan showed 1,696 sq. ft. of living space. Overall, the house is 27' wide and 34' deep. S. Rubright asked about landscaping. E. Padovani said there will be a couple of shrubs. Some existing trees will remain. I wasn't proposing any scrubs as a buffer. There is a fence proposed on the northeast and south property line. The engineer put it in the plan.

T. Granahan asked C. Neighbor to advise appropriate buffering since we are requiring buffers for new applications. The existing tree line is the required. P. Strub said the applicant is not prepared to answer basic fundamental questions, and we have to have our Planner read his plan for him. I don't understand this. K. Howes advised that she didn't think questions would occur involving the engineer, so we didn't bring him. T. Granahan said it would be prudent if you brought all of your professionals so we don't delay the plan any longer. We will continue this first at the May meeting. S. Rubright said we are adjourning this without further notice required until May 24, 2006.

The first order of new business is a request for site plan approval to install Pop Merrigan's Restaurant and Pub at Rt. 206S and Sherman Ave., Block 59, Lot 4. The applicant is also requesting a C variance for parking.

The attorney for the applicant was Carolyn Daly, 60 Washington Street, Morristown. The applicant, Joseph DePoortere, was the first witness. He was sworn in by S. Rubright. J. DePoortere said three years ago he purchased a liquor license in Raritan. Since that time they have been searching for a location. We found the current property and have hired experts for parking and traffic and an engineer. Our plan for the property is to open an old time Irish Pub. There is nothing in this town like it. It is like the Black Horse Inn and the Station Pub in Bernardsville. We will serve pub food. The difference between a bar and a pub is atmosphere. Target clientele is a professional crowd over 25 years old, and also families. I will also have Irish step dancing classes. There are six booths on the plan. Weekends and commuter dinner time would be the busiest.

Since the plan only shows four booths, T. Granahan requested revised plans for the May meeting. There will be 4-6 employees including bartenders. The hours of operation will be 11:00 A.M. – 1:00 or 2:00 A.M. and 12:00 – 12:00 on Sundays. The hours of operation for Animerge, next door, are 8:00P.M. – 6:00A.M. Deliveries would be made before 11:00A.M. Raritan Valley Disposal will pick up the trash at 9:00A.m. or before on a week day.

The police report addressed the parking onsite. The health report states that DEP approval is required and requests a detailed plan for the kitchen, bar area and seating.

The next witness was David Stires of Stires and Associates. D. Stires said the condemnation of the property to side Rt. 206 eliminated any parking on the 206 side of the building. There was parking on the Sherman Avenue side. To accommodate parking for Pop Merrigan's, we cut off a 30' section of the building on the east side. This will provide a main entrance and 10 spaces in front of the building with four spaces along Fleetwood Kitchens and four spaces on the Northeast corner. The ordinance requirements are based on sq. footage of patron area. That would be 44 spaces and we have proposed 28 of which 2 are handicapped. There is on-street parking on Sherman Avenue. We are requesting a parking variance. In order to get to the 10 spaces by the tracks, you would drive down an alleyway that is two way, but only one car could fit at a time. S. Schrek was concerned about using the alley for two way traffic.

D. Stires said that in respect to S. Schrek's comments, we would like a waiver from the curbing. If we have to collect drainage, then we have to pipe it, which is involved. S. Schrek takes exception to the waiver and prefers curbing to fencing and shrubs. Without the curbs, there will be a less defined driving area.

T. Granahan said he likes the concept of the pub, but people do stand by the bar and around the dart board. That is why I would like to know the maximum capacity. S. Rubright said that based on the capacity, the 44 space requirement may be low. W. Salerno was concerned with the parking. It's a shame you can't get a turn around for the 10 spaces in the rear. V. Laggini wanted to know the length of the alley. D. Stires said it is 80 ft. long. I am concerned with a patron backing up under the influence. My other concern is that the patrons not interfere with Animerge. D. Thomas asked where the employees would be encouraged to park. J. DePoortere said he would ask the employees to park in the ten spaces in back. D. Thomas said she doesn't like the alley. It is not safe. The parking isn't adequate. There will be a big mess on Sherman Avenue. I have a problem with this type of establishment being located so close to a park. P. Strub said it is a

great concept, but you have to work something out with the parking. A. Hudak was also concerned with parking as was F. Ruffa. F. Ruffa was also concerned with the proximity to the park. A. LoPresti wondered about the lease agreement.

The next witness to be sworn in by S. Rubright was Traffic Engineer, Gary Dean of Gary Dean Assoc., 916 Somerset Street, Watchung. G. Dean said no matter what goes on with this property, Sherman Avenue will have to be used for parking. Friday is a good time to look at parking on the street, because this would be a busy time at the pub. There are 55 on-street spaces. Every half hour for three hours, my staff conducted a walking count of cars. We observed a range of about 48 empty spaces. T. Granahan advised that Opening Day of Raritan baseball had not yet occurred. Those are our major ballfields, and we need a Plan B. G. Dean suggested valet parking. We can double stack, but the parking is still limited. We are not relying on Sherman Avenue, but after peakpark activity, it could be shard parking. T. Granahan said people will park wherever they want and it is noisy. If everything would be contained on you property, great, but it shouldn't overflow onto Sherman Avenue.

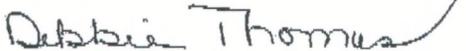
Robert DePootere, a partner in the proposed project, said he will recommend that his 6 employees park on Sherman Avenue have no problem with straight valet parking in the back. We will have bouncers outside. We are looking to be a good neighbor. This will be more of a cultural area than a shot and beer hang-out.

Public Comments:

Jeff Van Fleet, 107 Sherman Avenue is concerned with the overflow parking affecting his lot. My employees don't use any on street parking. I am concerned with traffic on Sherman Avenue and balls rolling across the street.

On a motion by F. Ruffa, seconded by V. Laggini, the meeting was adjourned at 10:40 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,



Debbie Thomas