

City of Northfield

Planning & Zoning Board

1600 Shore Road

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Minutes: February 1, 2007

Notice of this meeting had been given in accordance with Chapter 231 Public Law 1975, otherwise known as the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice of this meeting has been given to The Press, posted on the bulletin board in City Hall, and filed with the City Clerk, stating the date, time and place of the meeting and the agenda to the extent known.

The regular meeting of the Northfield Planning & Zoning Board, held on Thursday, February 1, 2007 in Council Chambers, City Hall, Northfield, was opened by Chairman Richard Levitt at 7:23 p.m. and the following members were present:

Dr. Richard Levitt-Chairman
Clem Scharff-Vice Chairman
Mayor Frank Perri
Jimmy Martinez, Councilman
Jeffrey Bruckler, City Administrator
Ron Roegiers
Nick Droboniku
Pete DaPrato
Henry Notaro
Guy Schlachter
Lou Milone
Jason O'Grady

Thomas Subranni, Esq.- Solicitor
Matt Doran, PE-Engineer

There was a reading of the Sunshine Law and roll call and all of the Board members and alternates were present.

The first application was an informal hearing for proposed improvements from B.F. Mazzeo Fruits and Produce located at Chestnut Avenue and New Road, Block 50, Lots 11 & 12. Robert L. Reid of Marathon Engineering, Swedesboro, NJ and Harry Harper, Architect were sworn in. Ben Mazzeo, Sr., owner of the property was also sworn in. The subject property is a 22-space parking lot and a single family dwelling currently used for accessory storage. They are proposing to replace the existing two story single family structure with a 100 square foot accessory storage building that will be compatible in design with the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed building will not increase impervious surface. The parking area will be used as access. The subject property is in the commercial O-PB zone. The applicant presently would like the Board's thoughts on the project.

The initial plans comply with the front yard setback and the side yard buffer requirements. Additional storage will reduce the amount of truck deliveries to the main building. Dr. Levitt asked if there would be loading ramps. Mr. Reid stated that truck deliveries would be at grade level. There would be an internal forklift and deliveries would be made to the site using van-sized trucks. Deliveries would be made during off peak periods and the parking area closest to the storage building would be used for employee parking. Mr. Harper presented architectural plans of the building which showed a barn-like structure described as a carriage house type of building. Mr. Harper said there would be rack storage inside and a pickup truck would fit inside to unload goods which would be racked on three levels using a forklift. They would like to have two doors. The roof was discussed. The height would have a ridge height of 30 ft. and a mean height of 25 ft. Only fruits and vegetables would be stored. Refrigeration would be contained in the back half of the building and hidden behind plastic curtain slats. The outside of the building would be a board façade. Dr. Levitt commented that he liked the idea of eliminating large trucks on site with running engines as they unload. He commented that the Board would consider restrictions on storage only use and no occupancy. Mr. Bruckler asked where the forklift would be stored and was told by Mr. Harper inside the building. Mr. Mazzeo stated they would have two forklifts-one at the main site and one in the accessory storage building. Mr. Harper commented that the Mazzeo's are looking into other sites for wholesale expansion. They would like to move the wholesale business off-site in the future. One of the purposes of the project is to eliminate tractor trailers from the site. Mayor Perri commented that the project would be an improvement to the site.

Mr. Reid continued by saying that they will need to request a rear setback variance. Currently they have 34 ft. where 35 ft. is required. They will be proposing 27.58 ft. All other setbacks conform. Dr. Levitt commented that the Board will want to see landscape buffer plans, will need to know hours of operations since they are near a residential zone, and they will need to explain in more detail the moving of trucks across Chestnut Avenue. He commented that decorative dormers would be nice for aesthetic purposes. Trees were discussed and Mr. Reid commented that they would like to save the two large trees that exist in front of the building. Mayor Perri said that he would like to see the cart way in front of the house pushed back as much as possible to increase road width and without jeopardizing the trees. Mr. Mazzeo said that there is a pond on site that was installed but has not been used in 10 years. Dr. Levitt said that no merchandise can be stored outside and that the doors should be closed when not in operation. There was no public who wished to be heard. Dr. Levitt ended the informal hearing by saying that the Board looks forward to hearing the formal application.

The next application of the evening was from B & B Realty Co., Block 29, Lot 5, 2307 New Road who are seeking a "C" Variance for a sign and a site plan waiver since no site improvements are proposed. The zoning is O-P. The attorney for the applicant is John R. Armstrong, Esq. of Cooper Levenson in Sea Isle City. B&B Realty Company is owned by Robert J. and Jayne A. Bray and "Braces" is an orthodontic partnership between Drs. Robert J. Bray and E. Gregory Pfund. At this point, Chairman Levitt recused himself from the remainder of the meeting due to the fact that he is a fellow dentist and felt there could be a conflict of interest. Before leaving, he asked Mayor Perri for an update on the request to City Council for funds necessary to complete the Master Plan revisions. The Mayor answered that this will be addressed in 2 weeks at the public budget hearings. Vice Chairman Scharff moved to the center of the dais to chair the remainder of the meeting.

Mr. Armstrong gave an overview of the application. They are seeking approval to add lettering (18,185 square feet) on an existing canopy for the Bray/Pfund orthodontist practice called "Braces". They seek two variances due to ordinance 8.34, section G & L which prohibits awnings. The 1st variance sought is to allow the awning itself. The second variance is for the square

footage which exceeds the permitted footage allowed on a building sign. No additional changes to the property are sought.

The office manager of Braces and the property manager of Bray & Bray Realty is Kirk J. Scalfaro. He was sworn in by Mr. Scharff. Exhibits A-1 (Site plan) and A-2 (Photo Board of their other Practices) was admitted to the record. Mr. Scalfaro described the 4 practices located in Absecon and Somers Point (high volume practices), the practice in Wildwood, which is a satellite office open once every 6 weeks, and the Northfield office which is now used for storage and administrative purposes. The Northfield office may be considered as a second satellite office in the future which would see patients every 3 to 6 weeks. The first floor is 936 sq. ft. and the 2nd floor is 995 sq. ft. The awning is 65 sq. ft. and the lettering consisting of two names and the "Braces" logo in the center total 18.185 sq. ft.

Mr. Scalfaro continued to answer questions from Mr. Armstrong. He described the practice as being unlike a typical dental office. Patients are seen once a month or every 6 weeks. Appointment times are ½ hour and set up at the convenience of the patients. They can only have two offices open at one time. Mr. Armstrong discussed the photo board showing the sign logos. He then questioned Mr. Scalfaro about the Northfield location and current uses of the property. He answered that the upstairs is used for storage and records. The site handles deliveries. The first floor is used for additional storage. The applicants want the lettering in place to establish name recognition and the business office location. The Northfield office is the main administrative office for business meetings and deliveries.

Mr. Armstrong addressed the parking. There are currently 15 spaces. The 2nd floor would never be used for patients. The first floor could in the future contain 4 treatment chairs and a staff including a Doctor, 2 assistants and 1 receptionist and treatment coordinator. This could total 4 patients in chairs and 4 in the waiting room maximum. Mr. Armstrong next discussed the immediate need for the variances and discussed the benefits. Using the photo exhibit showing other businesses in Northfield with awning-type signs, he said the design is attractive, clean and simple. The advertising on the sign is limited and professional. The Business will be quickly identifiable from the roadway by drivers passing by. Other businesses who display awning type signs are "Feather your Nest", Dan Morris Insurance, Washington Mutual and Subway. They feel there is no detriment as proven by their other practices and the existence of awnings on other businesses in town.

Mr. Armstrong addressed the site plan which shows an existing free standing sign. This sign was used by the previous tenant, a Law Firm, and the applicants would like to make use of this sign in the future.

Mr. Roegier's presented questions about the sign and the measurements. Mr. Armstrong stated that the lettering would not run the entire length of the awning. Mr. Schlachter asked if there was adequate parking for a Doctor's Office. Mr. Doran said if only the 1st floor was considered, 7 spaces would be needed. He also noted that the original plan does not show 15 spaces for parking. Mr. Armstrong agreed that there were only 11 spaces shown, but new parallel spaces have since been added. Mr. Schlachter asked if there was proper handicapped parking and was told that there was. Mr. Schlachter asked about visibility if the lot was at capacity. Mr. Doran said the original plan shows a site triangle which can be kept clear if a problem comes up since the plan is on file.

At this point, Mr. Subranni reminded the applicants and the Board that the application is for the awning lettering only. They are not applying for any use changes present or future at this time. Mayor Perri clarified by stating that the applicants would need to file a certificate of business with the Zoning/Construction Department to operate an orthodontist practice. If deemed appropriate for the zone by the Zoning Official and Construction Official they would not need to come before

the Board. If denied because they did not meet all the criteria, they would need to come before the Board. The Mayor commented further that the use is permitted in the zone and that they only need to meet the criteria for parking and for the permit application. This would be determined by the Zoning Official and Construction Official.

Mr. Milone noted that the lighting on the free standing sign is haphazard and would like to see this addressed. He was told there may be a broken light and that this would be looked into.

Mr. Doran gave his Engineer's report. The applicants have provided testimony as to the "C" variances. There are partial sidewalks at the site and the Board needs to address sidewalks as they are regulated. He advises against requiring new trees 30 ft. on center as required on New Road since anything that blocks sight on this busy road could be a danger. Mr. Armstrong asked that additional sidewalks be waived due to the limited relief sought. Other developed properties in this area do not have sidewalks. An example is a nearby dental office. The narrow area on the side of the property may not be able to support new trees and they may not survive, but they would be amenable to looking into this.

Vice Chairman Scharff opened the meeting to the public. Linda Foy of 2425 Shepherd Circle, Block 27, Lot 26, Ray Welsh of 2416 Shepherd Circle, Block 29, Lot 4 and Sameh Ghattas, who recently sold 2416 Shepherd Circle, were sworn in. Mrs. Foy spoke first. She has lived at her property, the 3rd house from New Road, for 35 years and stated that traffic does not move well in this area. She has trouble parking in front of her home due to Heather Clark's Dental Practice now and fears an increase in problems. She has witnessed Dr. Clark's patients parking in the Braces parking lot. Mr. Ghattas stated he has seen Dr. Clark's employees parking on the street. He has cleaned up after snowfalls and the employees park in front of his property (when he owned it). They remained parked for up to 8 hours at a time. He worries about children since the school is nearby. He is unsure how the signage will affect the area, but feels it is unfair to the residents. Mrs. Foy has a handicapped husband and feels he cannot walk in the neighborhood safely. She thinks the awnings will be a distraction to drivers. She has witnessed parking in front of the fire hydrant on her street. She also made note about a pothole.

Mayor Perri informed Mrs. Foy that she needs to file a complaint concerning these issues. The Zoning Officer needs to address these problems. Mr. Doran and the City are responsible for addressing the pothole. The Mayor further stated that the applicants could put up an unattractive back lit building sign without the Board's approval. Our area is expanding due Atlantic City's increasing gaming areas. He believes enforcement is doing the best they can to control the fact that more cars and people are in the area. Parking in front of the fire hydrant is a police issue and should be reported. He commented that all streets are for public parking, but businesses cannot overflow into residential neighborhoods. This is a Zoning Department issue. Mr. Scharff agreed that the Zoning officer, the Construction Official and the Police Department need to be contacted. The public session was closed.

The Mayor made a motion for the two "C" variances for the awing sign and the square footage of the sign. Mr. Milone seconded the motion. The site plan waiver will be included in the resolution and Mr. Subranni reminded that consideration is limited to what the applicants applied for. A roll call vote was unanimous for approval. Mayor Perri, Mr. Martinez, Mr. Bruckler, Mr. Scharff, Mr. Milone, Mr. Roegiers, Mr. Droboniku, Mr. DaPrato, and Mr. Notaro participated in the voting.

There was one resolution to memorialize for Sigano's Realty. Mr. Milone abstained and the vote was unanimous for approval.

Vice Chairman Scharff closed the meeting at 8:56 p.m. with a motion from Mayor Perri and a second from Mr. Bruckler.

Respectfully submitted, Robin Atlas, Secretary to the Board