

City of Northfield Planning & Zoning Board
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Minutes: April 16, 2009

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 had 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, April 16, 2009 in Council Chambers, City Hall, Northfield, was opened by Chairman Richard Levitt at 7:32 p.m. and the following members were present:

Dr. Richard Levitt-Chairman
Clem Scharff-Vice Chairman-absent
Mayor Vincent Mazzeo-absent
Jimmy Martinez, Councilman
Chief Robert James
Lou Milone
John Clifford-absent-scheduled to be sworn in next week
Ron Roegiers
Henry Notaro
Jim Shippen
Linda Dyrek

Norman Zlotnick, Solicitor
Matt Doran, PE-Engineer

There was one application on the agenda for this evening. The applicant is Kensington Square, LLC, Block 16.01, Lots 61, 62 & 63.02 at 200 Tilton Road located in the R-C Zone. They are seeking an amended site plan with sign variances and conditional use approval for an extension of Formica's Bakery as a limited use restaurant. Joel Fleishman, Esq. of Fleishman-Daniels in Northfield, the Attorney for Kensington, introduced those associated with the project. Present were Leo B. Schoffer and Michael L. Grossman, managing members of the corporation, members of the Kratchman family who own 13 Kitchen Caper stores in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, Patsy Levenson, who would like to open Patsy's Card Shop at the Kensington site, and John Hines.

Mr. Schoffer and Pete Dolcy of Duffy, Dolcy, McManus and Roesch of Galloway, who is the Professional Engineer for the project, were sworn in. Mr. Schoffer gave a synopsis of the current status of Kensington Square. It has been two years since the purchase of Kensington Square and Oscar Huber Furniture has occupied the space formally occupied by Kensington Furniture and the space occupied was approximately 71,000 sf. The original business plan was to attract regional and national stores similar to those located along Route 73, but they have since changed direction. They now feel the site is more suited to family businesses recognized in the area.

Mr. Schoffer described the stores currently located at the site. The stores consist of: Accents (an Accessory store), Keller Williams Realty, Formica Bros. Café Bakery and currently, a home furnishing store, Surroundings, formerly of Cornerstone, is under construction. He added that the concept has changed to more of a 'main street' idea.

Mr. Schoffer said in the fall of 2008, the Oscar Huber store announced they were going bankrupt, and their first reaction was to find another national company to replace them. Oscar Huber occupied over 70,000 sf and it was decided that it would be hard to find a retailer this large in these times. The best approach would be to go with a downtown main street concept. Mr. Grossman would like to open a smaller Kensington Furniture store in the space occupying approximately 30,000 sf. This section of the property would be named "The Shops at Kensington Square" and would contain a variety of shops. Included with Kensington Furniture would be "Kitchen Capers". The owners have 13 additional stores and this retailer is like no other. Kensington Square has a commitment from "Creative Window Designs" which has three other sites and "Patsy's Card Studio" with a location in Margate. The owners are also negotiating with a book store and a flower shop.

Mr. Schoffer spoke about the approvals needed and said Mike Ditallo, Northfield's Zoning Official, has already approved the window design store and Kitchen Capers as suitable uses and conditional uses may be necessary for Patsy's card shop and Formica's Express. Additional square footage for building façade signage will be needed and the agreement with Kitchen Capers is based on approval of this signage. Mr. Schoffer said the signage will match the existing signage on the building and will not be of the typical box signage type. The lettering on the brick wall will be the store name "Kitchen Capers" and two additional lines will be added in the future for additional tenants for identification purposes. They will be using approximately 20% of the brick wall and the signage will consist of three lines at 63 sf each.

Mr. Schoffer concluded by saying that they have spent considerable time, money and investment and they want to return the property to the glory that it once was-a first class establishment that the town can be proud of.

Chairman Levitt asked for clarification as to the location of the Kensington Furniture store. Mr. Schoffer described the exhibit showing the location of the proposed stores. He added that Formica's Express would not be cooking any food. The kitchen will remain next store in the main restaurant. Chairman Levitt asked about the warehouse space and was told it is currently vacant. Dr. Levitt asked if it would be used for additional retail space. Mr. Schoffer commented that the goal is to rent the area as warehouse space, but it could be converted in the future. Dr. Levitt said his concern would be the need for more signage. Chairman Levitt asked about the Ethan Allen section on the other side of the property and Mr. Schoffer said that space is also currently vacant. He added that they already have square footage approval for signage for that section of the building. He noted that they have been drawing from a bank of square footage previously approved and Mr. Fleishman agreed that there is 218 sf of signage available.

Mr. Dolcy testified that they were previously given 730 sf of signage for the building and tonight they are asking for the signage for The Shops at the Square, where the Oscar Huber sign currently is located and they are asking for a net increase of 258 sf for the entire site. This is to include the three new building façade signs at 67 sf each. Mr. Dolcy completed a parking analysis on the plans and said even with the increased retail space, they have plenty of parking and do not need a variance. Chairman Levitt questioned the need for conditional use approval for the card shop since the zone is R-C which allows acceptable retail shops. Mr. Schoffer said Mr. Ditallo requested that the Board approve this type of retail store. Dr. Levitt said it should be fine as long as the parking is adequate. Mr. Schoffer added that tonight's approval is to include the previous

"Clearance Center" located at the back of the mezzanine area, but not the warehouse section. Mr. Roegiers asked if "Patsy's Card Shop" would be a freestanding store. Mr. Schoffer said the store would occupy natural space with a wall in back similar to a 21st century style department store. Mr. Schoffer also added that they want to avoid having to come back before the Board each time they obtain a new tenant and they want to be able to offer the two new larger tenants signage. Mr. Dolcy said there are no exterior changes to the structures; all changes are in the interior.

Mr. Fleishman agreed with Matt Doran that the signage requests are under the provisions of a "C" 2 variance and that the purposes of benefits outweighing any detriments are being promoted. Mr. Dolcy said the signage will promote economics and safety issues as the signs will direct customers to the shops. He believes there are no detriments and that the signs will blend architecturally and will cover only 20% of the brick wall. He added that Formica's Express Cafe satisfies conditions in the ordinance for restaurants and actually exceeds them.

Mr. Roegiers brought up the issues of lighting and hours. Mr. Schoffer said they have replaced all the lighting with new fixtures and this is an improvement. Mr. Roegiers asked what hours the lights are illuminated. Mr. Schoffer said Monday through Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Sunday 12:00 noon until 5:00 p.m. and that all signs are internally illuminated.

Mr. Doran read his Engineer's report and said that most of the issues have been addressed. Mr. Doran asked for more on the sf of the signage for the new retail areas. Mr. Schoffer said the sf is 183 sf divided by 3 signs. Mr. Doran asked what would occur for signage if four or five more small stores were added. Mr. Schoffer said he does not envision putting up a sign for every tenant and that available sf will determine this. He gave an example that there would not be a sign for Patsy's Card Shop and that wall signage is for the larger tenants and the free standing sign will be used for smaller stores.

Chairman Levitt opened the public session and seeing no one who wished to speak, he closed the session. He asked the Board for questions and comments. Councilman Martinez thanked all involved for making things happen with the property and for their efforts considering the economy and he wished the owners and retailers good luck. He commented that this could have been a vacant site and he hopes they all do well. Mr. Milone added that from what he has read, the Kitchen Capers store seems like a good establishment.

Mr. Robert Kratchman was sworn in and described the products and cookware that Kitchen Capers is known to carry. They stock the top name brands and feel the synergy in this area is good from what they have been hearing. Chairman Levitt wished them good luck.

A discussion ensued concerning the sf of signage that needs approval. Mr. Dolcy said 258 sf of additional signage is being requested which includes the three signs on the brick wall and the increase in signage above the entrance. Also a conditional use request is needed for Formica's limited service café. Mr. Fleishman clarified that 69 sf of additional signage is needed in the front over the door where "Oscar Huber" was located. The three signs on the wall will be 63 sf each for a total of 180 sf (69 sf + 189 sf = 258 sf increase in total).

The first vote was for a "C" 2 variance for building façade signage to allow 258 sf over the 730 sf previously approved in total as per the attached drawings for the advertising (identification) for the shops. Chief James made the motion and Mr. Martinez seconded. Mr. Martinez, Chief James, Mr. Roegiers, Mr. Notaro, Mrs. Dyrek, Mr. Shippen and Chairman Levitt voted yes in favor of the variance. Mr. Milone abstained since he arrived at the meeting at 8:01 p.m. due to a Library meeting. The second vote was for conditional use for Formica's Express Café, a limited service café in the mezzanine area of The Shops. The vote also included the amended preliminary and

final site plan for an indoor shopping venue of mixed retail subject to limitation uses in the RC Zone. Mr. Martinez made the motion and Mr. Shippen seconded. Mr. Martinez, Chief James, Mr. Roegiers, Mr. Notaro, Mrs. Dyrek, Mr. Shippen and Chairman Levitt voted yes in favor. Mr. Milone abstained.

There was one resolution to memorialize for David & Ilene Branderbit, Block 132, Lot 39.05, a street address of 706 Second Street for a "C" variance for an existing oversized accessory garage. Mr. Martinez made the motion and Mr. Shippen seconded. A voice vote was all in favor. There were no abstentions.

Chairman Levitt stated that the next Ordinance Committee meeting will be set at the next Planning Board meeting on May 7, 2009.

Chairman Levitt made a few comments about the last Ordinance Committee meeting held March 28, 2009. Representatives from the Atlantic City Country Club were present at that meeting and the general testimony was that there were no plans for development at this time. They said the Gold Course remains a vital part of their business plan but the Country Club does not have the final say. There is no promise of what the future will hold since elements exist which are outside of local control, but there are no immediate development plans. Chairman Levitt said the committee will continue to look at that area, at lot sizes, and other types of uses in order to preserve as much open space as possible should the economy force changes in that area. The committee is also looking at eliminating SIC codes and will consider senior citizen zones. There is pressure from the State Legislature that may affect areas approved for senior citizen development which have not been developed. They may want to open up these areas to multi-family developments which will affect schools and recreational areas. This legislature has not been signed, but is something to watch out for.

The meeting was closed by Chairman Levitt at 8:22 p.m. with a motion from Mr. Shippen and a second from Mr. Roegiers.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Atlas, Secretary to the Board