

**BOROUGH OF RARITAN
PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES
December 18, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER & FLAG SALUTE

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. in the Borough of Raritan Municipal Building. Chairman LoPresti read the Open Public Meetings statement into the record.

Chairman LoPresti announced that the Gregory Natale Use Variance application would be carried to January 22, 2025, at 6:30 without further Notice (*except for the person that was missed*).

ROLL CALL

Present

Chairman LoPresti
Ms. Carra
Mayor Carra
Councilman Tozzi
Mr. Murphy
Mr. Cunningham
Ms. Windrem
Mr. Jayaraj
Mr. Gara

Also Present

Matt Flynn, Board Attorney
Joe Brosnan, Board Engineer/Planner
Lou Gara, Construction/Zoning Official, Board Secretary

Absent

Mr. Decicco
Ms. Debellis

MINUTES

Motion by Mr. Murphy, **seconded** by Mr. Cunningham to approve the Minutes of **October 23, 2024**, as presented.

Roll Call:

Aye: Chairman LoPresti, Mayor Carra, Mr. Cunningham, Ms. Carra, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Jayaraj, Mr. Gara,

Nay:

Abstain: Councilman Tozzi, Ms. Windrem

MISCELLANEOUS (Area in Need of Rehabilitation)

Angela Knowles of ASK Community Planners provided an overview of her presentation on the designation of an area in need of rehabilitation without redevelopment designation. Attorney Flynn clarified that this was rehabilitation rather than redevelopment and explained that Council had taken action that enabled the Board to hear her presentation. He also explained the next steps in the process and advised that the Board should make their concerns known to him so he could then impart them to Council by way of letter.

Ms. Knowles explained that the area included a portion of the downtown with a focus on Somerset Street as a business corridor and the surrounding area also taken into consideration. She provided a history of the study, including on the TPA grant which helped identify areas for Planning projects. She explained that as a result of funding that had been awarded for technical assistance, the Borough was able to hire FHI studio who incorporated public outreach into their approach at identifying challenges in design and ways to move forward. She explained that meetings were held and working groups convened which resulted in the presentation of three documents for adoption: The Downtown Raritan

Vision Plan, a redevelopment plan and an Implementation Toolbox. These documents, she explained all make up the Downtown Economic Development Plan which created the vision for the area ultimately.

Ms. Knowles explained that at the time the TAP grant was going on, Somerset County was also looking at a supporting priority investment framework which incorporated the Raritan mall site and parts of downtown as parts of the Borough that should be looked at. She explained that Ride wise was also undertaking their Street-Smart Pedestrian Safety campaign and a Walk/Bike/Hike Plan which related to a 15k grant from the Regional Center Partnership that supported an update to the Circulation Plan.

Ms. Knowles explained that one of the recommendations was to designate the downtown as area as an area in need of rehabilitation and that the purpose of designating the area was to encourage renovation and reconstruction of existing structures. She explained further that once designated, the Borough could move forward with the projects identified in those documents.

Ms. Knowles explained that the area had to meet 1 out of 6 criteria and that it met several, as outlined in her report. She reviewed those criteria and concluded that the area qualifies under #2,5 and 6. She explained that the next step would be to make recommendations to Council, followed by a public hearing. She then explained that if designated, it goes to the State and outlined that process. She spoke about the next steps going forward from a Planning perspective, including looking at more public outreach, updating the plan and confirming the vision.

Ms. Knowles explained that in the Economic Development Plan, there were areas that were identified as potential redevelopment areas. She suggested that the Borough should look at setting up a program for property owners to capitalize on a tax abatement/exemption program.

Mr. Cunningham asked for clarification which she provided. She confirmed that the abatement was only on the improvements/increase in value. Mr. Cunningham asked about/commented on residency restrictions, the study area and the cost of the study. Ms. Knowles explained that consultants were hired through the grant and discussed same.

Ms. Carra, commented that Council was talking about designating the area on Somerset St, but she would like to see the whole area designated. Mr. Cunningham asked about the benefit to the town and impacts of utilization. Discussion ensued on how to designate other areas. The Mayor provided clarification.

Mr. Brosnan arrived at 6:40 and joined the discussion. He offered that if the program was successful, it would be a hallmark to expand the scope. Attorney Flynn offered to include this in his letter to Council. Timeframes were discussed and further discussion ensued on the area of study and potential phasing. Mr. Flynn suggested that he could recommend designation of the whole area with a focus area. Ms. Knowles referred to the Implementation Toolbox.

A discussion ensued about whether designation opens up additional funding from the State, etc. Ms. Knowles indicated that it potentially would. Mr. Brosnan added that the Borough would use it as leverage for consideration of other grants.

Chairman LoPresti asked whether it was specific to structural components or included site work as well. Ms. Knowles responded. Mr. Cunningham suggested that it would be important to focus on rehabilitation for what it is, not redevelopment. Attorney Flynn asked for recommendations and suggested the following based on discussions:

- Recommend that it meets criteria
- Recommend that the area should be designated
- Request clarification on how implementation of the tax abatement ordinance would work

- Generally, approve of designation of the area and if successful, recommend expanding to surrounding areas in the future
- Recommend in the timeline to start with Somerset Street

Public Comment

Tom Brown of Elmer Street stated that he “strongly urged” that the Board NOT designate starting with Somerset Street, because that’s as far as it will go. He spoke about the purpose of the study/plan as it relates to access to Duke Farms and suggested that if the program were subjugated to Somerset St., it would undermine this.

Attorney Flynn clarified that the intent is to limit impacts to surrounding areas. A discussion ensued about starting with Somerset Street. Attorney Flynn amended the proposed recommendations as it related to the timeline and prioritizing certain areas. He re-reviewed the criteria and spoke about next steps.

Bonnie Allen of Glaser Ave asked for clarification on the terms of the abatement. She stated that it would be “a slap in the face” to owners who have improved their homes and spoke about the impact to home values of “hundreds of apartments” near her home. Ms. Knowls explained that the bigger picture is revitalization of Somerset Street and the reason for incorporating the neighborhood was to realize a trickledown effect.

Chris Allen of Glaser Ave commented about absentee owners getting tax breaks. Mr. Cunningham suggested that the governing body look at those people and properties in decline.

Motion by Councilman Tozzi, **seconded** by Ms. Windrem to authorize Attorney Flynn to send a letter to Council outlining the Board’s recommendations with respect to the Area in Need of Rehabilitation.

Roll Call:

Aye: Chairman LoPresti, Mayor Carra, Mr. Cunningham, Ms. Carra, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Jayaraj, Mr. Gara, Councilman Tozzi, Ms. Windrem

Nay:

Abstain:

Engineering

- Mr. Brosnan provided an update on the following matters:
- Preconstruction meeting with KM regarding Richard Street drainage (work expected to begin in January).
- Payments from NJAW to cover additional resurfacing in/around area/Grant for rest of area
- Site meeting (new Municipal Building) 1 final change order pending
- Working with Vince on road program (pavement preservation tactics/micro surfacing)

Planning

- Mr. Brosnan advised that the State plan came out and that Mr. Gara had circulated something from the County which stated that they want Raritan to put together a Committee for looking at local interpretation of the Master Plan and local ordinances to be communicated to the County Planner. Deadlines and membership were discussed. It was determined that it would be appropriate for the Redevelopment Committee to serve in this capacity.
- Mr. Brosnan advised that he started clearing resolution compliance and was currently working on Raritan Crossing and Brielle Capital.
- Mr. Gara advised that LaGrange would probably be on for completeness on January 22.
- Mr. Brosnan advised that he would follow up with the County on the reserved parking on Main Street.

APPLICATION

Luis and Ana Mayen
Block 65, Lot 29 (1034 Helene Place)
Bulk Variance

Luis Mayen entered his appearance and explained the reason for his request for relief as it relates to deteriorating health. He explained that there were several existing hardships on the property.

Architect Cory Fernandez (Total Architecture) was sworn and qualified. Mr. Fernandez explained that the variance was for the addition of a ground level addition on top of an existing concrete drive which would add impervious coverage in the back corner which is currently grass. He referred to page A1.01 of the plan set and reviewed the proposed bedroom layout. Mr. Fernandez referred to the last sheet of the plan set which he identified as the front elevation. He reviewed the comments from Van Cleef and introduced **Exhibits A-D** which he explained were intended to address the completeness items such as identification of the water/sewer line, existing driveway and parking requirements. RSIS requirements were discussed. The Board concluded that parking, as proposed was adequate.

A landscape plan with respect to coverage was discussed, as were the coverage calculations which Mr. Fernandez testified that he agreed with. Mr. Fernandez confirmed that the hardships were for front yard setback and lot size. Referencing his final exhibit, Mr. Fernandez indicated that the neighboring houses both have the same addition, making the applicant's proposal in keeping with other homes in the neighborhood.

Mr. Brosnan confirmed that the exhibits, as presented satisfied any outstanding completeness issues. He confirmed that the variance was a C (1), and that landscaping would be acceptable to mitigate any negative impacts.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Attorney Flynn reviewed the extent of relief, and the Board deliberated.

Motion by Mr. Cunningham, **seconded** by Mayor Carra to approve the application.

Roll Call:

Aye: Chairman LoPresti, Mayor Carra, Mr. Cunningham, Ms. Carra, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Jayaraj, Mr. Gara, Councilman Tozzi, Ms. Windrem

Nay:

Abstain:

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion, seconded and unanimously carried to adjourn at 7:42.

Respectfully submitted,



Lou Gara, Board Administrator/Secretary

Approved: 1/22/2025