

Metuchen Planning Board Minutes
Virtual Meeting
March 4, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by Eric Erickson, Chairperson, who read the statement in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act.

Present:	Ellen Clarkson, Vice Chairperson	Jonathan Lifton
	Alan Grossman	James Griffin, Alt I
	Melissa Perilstein, Administrator	Robert Renaud, Attorney
	Linda Koskoski, Councilmember	Christopher Cosenza, Planner
	Joel Branch, Mayor's Designee	Robert Mannix, Engineer
	Lynn Nowak	Patricia Cullen, Zoning Official
	Richard Green III	Denise Hamilton, Secretary
	Eric Erickson, Chairman	

Absent: Jonathan Busch, Mayor
Jay Galeota, Alt. II

NEW BUSINESS:

21-1288 Aros Development LLC – Applicant is seeking preliminary and final major subdivision plan approval to create three lots on parcel.

443 Middlesex Avenue Block 117 Lot 93

Mr. Renaud explained that the areas the application should cover are plans for the lot and how it conforms to the Redevelopment Plan.

Mr. Richard Mongelli, Applicant's Attorney, stated that they are proposing modifications and improvements, including preservation of the historic structure on the Middlesex Avenue lot. Several professional witnesses would be presenting.

William Lane, Engineer; Mark Marcille, Architect; Nancy Zerbe, Contract Purchaser; and Anthony Rosamilia, Applicant, were sworn in by Mr. Renaud.

Mr. Lane has been a Licensed Engineer in New Jersey for 23 years and was accepted by the Board as an expert witness. Exhibit A1, a combination of site and landscaping plans were shared onscreen. He explained that the plan is to subdivide the property into three lots; one on Middlesex Avenue and two new lots fronting on Highland Avenue. The Middlesex Avenue lot will total 27,365 square feet and retain the existing dwelling. Two new single-family, four bedroom houses, with single car garages would be constructed on Highland Avenue. Their garages will be accessible by new curb cuts on Highland Avenue. New trees are proposed along Highland, including landscaping of scrubs around the perimeter of the houses. The existing dwelling on Middlesex Avenue will have five apartments and a parking lot situated 26 feet away from the street. There will be five parking spaces in the front with one designated for handicap. An access ramp running alongside the building up to the front door will be created. There will be a bicycle storage area along the front. In the rear, the gravel will be extended for additional parking spaces, for a total of nine spaces on the premises. There will be buffer coverings around the building and parking lot. Additional landscaping will be added to the side of the parking lot that is visible from Middlesex Avenue, including a few more trees. The plan conforms to all bulk standards such as lot width, depth, and adequate parking spaces.

Mr. Renaud explained that the residential site improvement standards prevail as the application meets the number of parking spaces required.

Mr. Mongelli stated that the Applicant would comply with items mentioned in the Engineer's memo and agreed to additional submissions. Page 3, #14, regarding Public Utility facilities, Applicant is unclear what PSEG will require, however, they will comply with their requirements.

Mr. Mannix voiced concern that there could be a capacity issue with the drainage and suggested to have the roof leaders drain to drywell into the manhole near the common property line. The engineers were in agreement to work together to create a more efficient drainage system.

Mr. Erickson invited comments from the Board for the witness.

The Board questioned the footprint of the houses, at which time Mr. Lane referred that question to the Architect.

Mr. Mark Marcille was accepted by the Board as an expert witness. He shared his screen and stated that both dwellings would be in line with the existing houses on Highland Avenue. The sideyards were offset to meet the setback requirements. The front porches were kept narrow and the garage is 16 feet from the base of the front porch. The footprints of both houses are identical with the exception of the shape of the front porches and appearance of the front facade. Each house is 3,000 square feet, has four bedrooms, one car garage and standard living space requirements. He will work with the Planner regarding aesthetics.

The Board expressed concern that there were not two houses on the street that look alike, therefore these two may be standouts. Additionally, one house appears higher than the other.

Mr. Mongelli stated that the Planner has raised that concern and Applicant is willing to work out any issues.

Mr. Cosenza stated based on the architectural plans, the front portion of both houses measure 16 feet 8 inches. The footprints are the same. The problem could be with the different roof structures, which could be addressed.

Ms. Nancy Zerbe has been in the field of Historic Preservation for over 40 years. She is the owner of the house on Middlesex Avenue. It was built in the 1890s as a single family, but was subdivided in the 1940s into five apartments. The plan is to retain the five apartments with their existing configuration. The intent is to become certified with the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Society, which would also allow for some tax benefits. A preservation architect has been hired for the project. The exterior plans are consistent with the site plan presented and they will work closely with the Planner. Parking may be changed to four spaces in the front and five in the back. Bicycle storage has not been decided, but if a location cannot be found in the interior space, it will then be moved to the back of the building. She will work with the Planner on lighting and landscaping.

The Board questioned whether or not the existing enclosed porch would remain.

Ms. Zerbe responded that it would be eliminated, however, there are two small porches and front facade that will remain.

The Board questioned any restrictions on the number of handicap spaces.

Mr. Cosenza stated that there were no requirements for the ADA space, and any additional spaces would be at the discretion for the property owner.

The Board questioned the inclusion of solar panels.

Mr. Marcille responded that this was not a discussion with the Applicant.

Mr. Mongelli referred to the Planner's memorandum. They are in agreement and will comply.

Mr. Lane explained the reason for variance approval required. The issue arises because the area of the lot slopes down, so raising the grade, triggers the need for variance.

Mr. Cosenza stated that Storm Water Ordinance for Single Family Homes states that the basement floor level must be at least two feet above the seasonal high water table. As a result, the houses will be a little higher off the ground. To balance that, as a bulk standard, the finished floor cannot be more than four feet over the finished grade or the preconstruction grade, whichever is lower. The floor is down so it creates an issue, although the houses look consistent with the streetscape, they sloop down. The grading being proposed will make it more consistent.

Mr. Renaud clarified that it is the Board's decision to grant the grading variance for lot 93.03 for 11 inches, and lot 93.02 for 2 inches.

There was a discussion among the Borough's Professionals that a Condition of Approval for the Application would be to include minor site plan changes. This would avoid additional hearing before the Board for minor changes.

Mr. Renaud mentioned that the Planner must approve final lighting and landscaping plans.

Mr. Erickson invited additional questions/comments from the Board.

The Board commented that the design of the driveway area was not pleasing and requested clarification of the grading variance.

Mr. Cosenza commented that the lower grade is a pre-existing condition and the application makes it more conforming by proposing to raise the grade. It is a unique condition because the grade is lower. The new grade will be consistent with the streetscape. There should be no detriment to the neighborhood.

Board requested that the Applicant work with the Planner on the final product.

Public Portion:

Mr. Renaud explained the procedures and opened the floor to the public.

Mr. Larry Weiss, Resident, wanted to know if there was enough information to determine if drainage would become a concern. Would the additional homes create or help to resolve drainage issues?

Mr. Lane responded that behind the two new houses, there is a new drain line able to take on volume. Also, they will install drywell where the roof leaders will drain and overflow into the line being added in the rear. The additions should help to resolve drainage issues.

Mr. Erickson invited additional questions from the public. No one responded. He closed the floor for questions.

Mr. Erikson opened the floor for comments. No one responded. He closed the floor.

Mr. Mongelli had no additional comments.

Mr. Renaud stated the Conditions of Approval; 1) Application will be amended to include 'Application for Minor Site Plan Approval'; 2) Variance for the finished floor elevation for the two houses; 3) Agreement to work with the Board Engineer and Planner; 4) Applicant agrees to prepare and submit lighting and landscaping plans prior to the issuance of Certificate of Occupancy; 5) Alternate parking standards to be considered; 6) Landscaping for the new homes prior to permit being issued to be submitted for Planner's approval.

The Board expressed excitement for the effort made to preserve the historic structure. Lack of renewable energy being omitted still remains a concern.

Motion to approve was made by Councilmember Koskoski and seconded by Mr. Griffin. Ms. Clarkson, Councilmember Koskoski, Ms. Perilstein, Mr. Branch, Mr. Green, Ms. Nowak, Mr. Lifton, Mr. Griffin, and Mr. Erickson voted yes. Motion approved.

Correspondence:

Minutes, February 4, 2021

Motion to approve was made by Mr. Green and seconded by Councilmember Koskoski. Voice vote, all in favor, minutes were approved.

Minutes, February 10, 2021

Motion to approve was made by Mr. Green and seconded by Councilmember Koskoski. Voice vote, all in favor, minutes were approved.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Griffin and seconded by Mr. Branch. Voice vote, with all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 9:03pm.

Respectfully submitted,



D. E. Hamilton