

**MINUTES
TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
January 7, 2026, 7:30 P.M.**

The Township of West Orange Planning Board held its regular meeting on January 7, 2026, at 7:30 P.M. via virtual ZOOM videoconference.

Chairman Bagoff called the meeting to order at approximately 7:30 P.M. He announced that notification of the meeting was given to the Township Clerk, and posted on the Township Bulletin Board, sent to the West Orange Chronicle and the Star Ledger, and posted on the Township's website calendar. This meeting has been properly noticed to the public in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act. No new matters will start after 10:30 P.M.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

- *Chairman Bagoff* requested all persons stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The next Planning Board special meeting will be held **on January 14, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.** in person.
- The next Planning Board special meeting will be held **on January 28, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.** in person.
- The next Planning Board regular meeting will be held **on February 4, 2026, at 7:30 P.M.** via Zoom.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Dr. Robert Bagoff; Mr. Jerry Guarino;
Mr. Ken Alper; Mr. John Cardoza;
Mayor Susan McCartney; Mr. Christopher Morgan, Sr.;
Councilwoman Susan Scarpa; Mr. Lee Klein;
Mr. William Wilkes; Ms. Lori Kapferer; Mr. Frank Noborine;

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT:

Diana P. McGovern, Esq., Planning Board Attorney;
Diana L. Chandler, Planning Board Interim Secretary
Malvika Apte, Planning Board Planner
Jordan Zachary & Sean Savage, Planning Board Engineer

SWEARING IN

- The Township Professional(s) sworn in.

APPLICATIONS

- **PB 25-04 Blue Violet Grow Inc**
Block: 62 Lot: 22.01 Zone: I
76 Ashland Avenue

The applicant is proposing to operate a cannabis cultivation and manufacturing facility on

the subject premises, which is located in the I industrial Zone.

PRESENTATION

- William Sullivan, from Scarinci Hollenbeck, LLC, on behalf of the applicant, Blue Violet Grow LLC.
- The hearing is a continuation from the prior meeting.
- At the previous meeting, the Board heard testimony from:
 - o The applicant's representative (Jen Hardell).
 - o The project engineer.
 - o The project architect
- The applicant plans to present additional experts:
 - o Hector Corchado, Security expert
 - o John Barree, Planner
 - o Joseph Golden, Engineer
- The applicant's attorney reviews several site plan-related issues raised previously:
 1. The board requested dimensions showing sufficient width on the driveway "neck-down" area near the building.
 2. Removal of certain parking spaces:
 - o Two compact spaces.
 - o One 90-degree space near the fence.
 3. No parking variance, even after removals, the site will have 36 spaces, which is two more than required.
 4. Confirmation that new fencing will be a consistent 6 feet high.
 5. Addition of a tree between the applicant's building and the nearby apartment building.
 6. Any additional lighting required may be established as conditions of approval.
- The civil engineer, Joseph Golden, entered on the record; he was sworn under oath. His credentials were accepted by the board and he testified to the following:
 - Mr. Golden presents a new exhibit (A1), a revised plan that he has prepared.
 - o It is based on the original site plan with a revision date of January 7 to respond to the board's comments.
 - o Includes a zoomed-in section to clarify the specific areas under discussion.
 - Mr. Golden explains the driveway width concern.
 - The apparent narrowing ("neck-down") is largely a visual illusion caused by parking angles and easement angles.
 - A dimension was added showing:
 - o 24 feet of width between the building projection and the parking edge near the inlet.
 - The only narrower area is in the residential parking section, where the aisle is 18 feet wide.
 - The revised plan includes:
 - o A new green space approximately 12 x 24 feet
 - o Removal of existing asphalt in that area
 - o Installation of grass and a tree
 - The proposed tree species is a Northern Red Oak
 - Final species selection can be determined by the relevant municipal authority.
 - Three parking spaces were removed:
 - o Two compact spaces at the south end of the building.
 - o One perpendicular space near the fence line.
 - After these removals, the site now contains 37 parking spaces.

- This number satisfies the parking requirement.
- The plan includes a 24-foot-wide cross-access easement.
- The easement extends across both adjacent properties.
- A shed currently located in the area will be removed, allowing the easement to be expanded beyond what was originally proposed.
- A detail showing an 8-foot fence at a gate location is corrected. The plan has been updated to show a consistent 6-foot fence height throughout.
- Mr. Golden explains that some isolux patterns appear missing due to existing lighting fixtures not included in the model.
- Specifically:
 - o A large existing light mounted on a tall pole is present on site.
 - o Its mounting height and intensity data are unavailable, preventing inclusion in the lighting analysis.
- Proposed approach used in similar projects:
 - o Conduct a field lighting test using a light meter during the evening
 - o If lighting levels are found deficient, additional lighting can be installed.
- Some darker areas shown in the analysis are due to existing lights not modeled.
- Another darker area appears near the EV charging station.
- Mr. Golden suggests potential additional lighting from the building if necessary.
- He notes that the overall lighting design goal is to provide adequate illumination while avoiding excessive light spill.
- Is willing to add additional lighting if board professionals deem it necessary.
- The facility does not operate as a public nighttime destination.
- The site is employee-only, so there will not be significant nighttime pedestrian activity.
- A new exhibit is introduced, Exhibit A2, Circulation Plan.
- Mr. Golden explains that the plan includes revisions that improve circulation compared to the earlier analysis.
- The circulation diagram shows the cross-access easement highlighted in green.
- The easement is now larger than what Yerrr Canna had because an existing shed will be removed.
- Removing the shed increases maneuvering space for vehicles, especially at the corner where the delivery trucks (Mercedes Sprinter van) turn.
- The engineer confirms that the drive aisles are 24 feet wide, which is standard for shopping centers and large parking areas.
- The two parking spaces marked with Xs have been removed.
- Eliminating these spaces improves vehicle maneuverability.
- Mr. Golden reiterates a point from earlier testimony: all deliveries and employee access will occur via Park Avenue.
- The turning path shown entering from the top of the plan was part of the original Yerrr Canna application, but it is no longer relevant to this application.
- He states that plan revisions will remove this access path to avoid confusion.
- The overall parking layout remains largely similar to the previous Yerrr Canna design.
- Key features still present:
 - o Row of parking along the fence line
 - o Parking spaces near the building
- Mr. Golden explains that spaces were slightly rearranged to improve loading and circulation, but the general layout remains the same.
- He expresses confidence that the circulation design functions properly.

BOARD QUESTIONS

- Vice Chairman Guarino asked whether the emergency vehicle access plan has been reviewed by the West Orange Fire Department. Mr. Golden said he does not currently have written confirmation from the fire department. However, he understands from prior discussions that the plan had been reviewed in earlier hearings.
 - o The board suggests making fire department approval a condition of approval.
- Ms. McCartney asked whether the 18-foot driveway width on Ashland Avenue from exhibit A1 is still compliant. Mr. Golden said it is. He explains the 18-foot width is primarily for residential vehicles. It can also accommodate emergency vehicles.
- Ms. McCartney asked about lighting behind the building, since Mr. Golden mentioned a darker area earlier. Mr. Golden said the area is not dark to the point of poor visibility. The lighting level is slightly below the one-foot-candle standard, but still sufficient for safety.
- Mr. Klein asked about the 18-foot driveway leading to four residential parking spaces. Mr. Golden said the driveway is technically two-way, but there is no opposing parking along it. This allows vehicles to maneuver into and out of the four residential spaces.
- Mr. Klein refers to the S-shaped access path shown in the plan with a red border. He asked why the path is not made straight by flipping the double-stacked parking spaces toward the building. He suggests that doing so could create a direct path in and out rather than an S-shaped route. Mr. Golden responds that moving the lower row of parking toward the building (shown at the bottom of the plan) is not feasible due to site design constraints.

PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS

- Ms. Apte asked to clarify if the 18-foot driveway will be treated as a variance due to the ordinance requiring a 24-foot-width when it is a two-way traffic. Mr. Golden said it may be treated as either a variance or a design waiver.
- Ms. Apte asked if they would be meeting the one-foot candle requirement and wouldn't need the variance. Mr. Golden said no, they will still require a variance for isolated areas. Approximately 90% of the site meets the one-foot-candle standard.
- Ms. McGovern asked for more precise identification of the affected locations. Mr. Golden said they are looking for a variance for the areas in the main parking lot near the EV charging spaces. It is depicted in the original lighting plan previously submitted, not the new exhibits shown during the meeting.
- Ms. Apte asked if the parking spaces comply with the standard 9 ft × 18 ft stall size requirement. Mr. Golden said some spaces for the deli were previously striped incorrectly at about 8.5 ft wide. The revised striping will rebalance the spacing, making it compliant.
- Ms. Apte referenced the circulation diagram and asked whether the Sprinter delivery van shown in the diagram enters from Park Avenue and then backs into a parking space originally associated with the Yerr Canna facility. Mr. Golden clarifies that the entire area is now open, allowing easier maneuvering. Delivery vehicles will instead load in the designated loading area near the building.
- Mr. Savage asked regarding an updated turning plan to show the Sprinter van entering and exiting via Park Avenue. Mr. Golden said the diagram only demonstrates vehicle maneuverability; it does not represent actual traffic operations. He confirms that all deliveries and employee access will occur through Park Avenue.
- Mr. Savage asks about lighting requirements in the easement area. He notes that the lighting plan includes readings for the main site but not for part of the easement area on Lot 32. Mr. Golden explains that there is existing lighting already present in that parking area. He states that visual observation suggests adequate lighting currently exists, but it

must be verified with measurements.

NO PUBLIC QUESTIONS

PRESENTATION

- The security expert, Hector Corchado, entered on the record; he was sworn under oath. His credentials were accepted by the board, and the board is requiring a letter from the police department agreeing to the plan being presented. Mr. Corchado testified to the following:
 - The applicant's attorney confirms that the applicant seeks conditional use approval.
 - One condition that they must comply with is Chapter 5, Section 34 of the West Orange Municipal Code, which sets required security standards.
 - Mr. Corchado confirms that the proposed security plan he will present complies with this municipal ordinance.
 - He also notes the plan must comply with New Jersey Administrative Code regulations governing cannabis facilities.
 - The facility will have 68 security cameras installed throughout the interior and exterior of the building.
 - Camera footage retention:
 - o Minimum requirement: 30 days
 - o Proposed system: 90 days of recording storage.
 - The cameras are:
 - o NDAA-compliant (federally approved).
 - o 5-megapixel resolution, exceeding the 2-megapixel minimum typically required.
 - Higher resolution improves visibility, especially in low-light conditions.
 - Cameras include time and date stamps.
 - The surveillance system allows remote monitoring.
 - Cameras can be viewed from:
 - o Phones
 - o Computers
 - o Laptops
 - Monitoring will be conducted by:
 - o Investigators from the State police department appointed by the Cannabis Regulatory Commission (CRC).
 - o Mr. Corchado himself, who will also serve as security manager for the facility.
 - The system provides 24-hour surveillance coverage.
 - The building contains 27 doors.
 - Each door is equipped with a key-fob access system.
 - The system includes multiple security levels (1–3) depending on employee responsibilities.
 - Each key fob is:
 - o Assigned to a specific individual
 - o Logged and tracked
 - The system integrates door access logs with camera footage.
 - The security system integrates:
 - o Camera surveillance
 - o Alarm system
 - o Smart monitoring technology
 - Camera battery backup lasts up to 72 hours.
 - In the event of power loss, repairs must be arranged within 24 hours.

- The system must be tested every 30 days, and the testing must be logged in accordance with CRC regulations.
- All employees must undergo background checks.
- The checks are conducted by a private company called MoFoTrack.
- Anyone entering the facility must:
 - o Sign in
 - o Provide proper identification
 - o Be 21 years or older.
- Contractors performing work must:
 - o Schedule visits in advance
 - o Be escorted while inside the facility.
- Certain areas are designated sensitive areas, such as:
 - o Vaults
 - o Areas where cannabis products are stored.
- Individuals who are not authorized for those areas must be escorted at all times.
- Vendors or contractors cannot be left alone in those restricted spaces.
- The applicant submitted an emergency response plan to the West Orange Police Department.
- The plan outlines procedures for situations such as:
 - o Severe storms
 - o Power outages
 - o Other emergency conditions.
- Mr. Corchado believes the police department reviewed and accepted the plan, though the formal letter has not yet been issued.
- Mr. Corchado emphasizes the high quality of the surveillance cameras, particularly their low-light capabilities.
- Cameras are installed near building entrances and exits, working together with exterior lighting.
- He states that other facilities are using similar systems and no problems have occurred with identifying individuals.
- As the building is constructed and cameras are installed:
 - o The police department will work alongside the applicant.
 - o If police recommend additional security measures, the applicant will comply.
- Mr. Corchado explains that the owner hired an outside waste management vendor, Liberty City Waste Services.
- The vendor handles destruction of cannabis waste according to CRC regulations.
- Waste removal visits are scheduled in advance.
- Waste containers are placed in areas that are covered by cameras and well-lit
- Containers holding cannabis waste are locked.
- Mr. Corchado confirms that all waste will be stored indoors, not outside.
- Normal waste (such as cardboard and packaging materials) can be collected regularly.
- If trucks arrive for product delivery or removal:
 - o Security staff must be notified.
 - o A staff member will be present outside.
- CRC regulations require two authorized individuals must be present whenever cannabis products are handled or moved within the facility.
- Cannabis waste must be rendered unusable before disposal.
- This is done by mixing the cannabis waste with other materials in a 50-50 ratio.
- Possible mixing materials include:
 - o Wood chips

- Other approved substances.
- After mixing, Liberty City Waste Services removes the material from the site.

BOARD QUESTIONS

- Vice Chairman Guarino asked if the camera systems are going to be able to be monitored outside the facility. Mr. Corchado said yes, they can set up employees to monitor the cameras. The police department will also have access to the camera system in the case of an investigation.
- Mayor McCartney asked about the parking situation, noting that parking is difficult in the area and questioning whether the site would be fenced to prevent cars from parking overnight. Mr. Corchado responded that the area could be monitored and suggested installing signage and hiring a local towing company to provide 24-hour towing enforcement.
- Mr. Wilkes asked where the camera backup system would be stored and how long recordings would be kept. Mr. Corchado explained the backup systems are housed in an IT room within the facility. Additionally, footage will be stored for 90 days, exceeding the CRC requirement of 30 days.
- Mr. Klein asked whether external security cameras might view neighboring private properties. Mr. Corchado said camera angles can be adjusted to focus primarily on the facility's property. Cameras may capture limited views of nearby streets such as Park Avenue, depending on placement. They will not be positioned to look into private residences or windows, addressing privacy concerns.
- Mr. Klein asked if the fenced-in parking lot will be locked and closed at night when the facility is closed. Mr. Corchado said yes.
- Mr. Klein asked if towing enforcement would only apply to the outside parking area facing Park Avenue, not the secured internal lot. Mr. Corchado said if an unauthorized vehicle enters, cameras will detect the vehicle immediately. Staff can then contact the towing company to remove it.
- Chairman Bagoff asked what would happen if Liberty City Waste Services stopped working with the facility, referring to the destruction of the cannabis. Mr. Corchado said there is an approved list of contractors that can be substituted in.
- Chairman Bagoff asked who in town has to be notified that this has occurred. Mr. Corchado said there are no notification procedures, but will have to submit a new waste disposal plan to an assigned investigator by the CRC.
 - A condition was added that if security or waste removal vendors change, the West Orange Police Department must be notified within 24 hours after state approval.

PRESENTATION

- The professional planner, John Barree, entered on the record; he was sworn under oath. His credentials were accepted by the board and he testified to the following:
- Mr. Barree reviews the 9 conditions with the board.
 1. Local Cannabis License:
 - The facility must obtain a local cannabis license under township code.
 - The applicant has already begun the process with the town council.
 - Final approval from the board must occur before the license can be issued.
 2. Distance from Schools:
 - Cannabis facilities must be at least 500 feet from any school property line.
 - The site complies.
 3. Distance from Houses of Worship:

- Cannabis facilities must also be at least 500 feet from houses of worship.
- The site complies.
- 4. Parking Requirement:
 - Cannabis cultivation/manufacturing facilities with no more than 10 employees must provide 1 parking space per 1,000 square feet.
 - The site meets parking requirements.
- 5. No Mobile or Vehicle-Based Facilities
 - Cannabis businesses cannot operate from vehicles or movable structures.
 - This application does not propose such operations.
- 6. No Home-Based Cannabis Operations
 - Cannabis businesses cannot operate as home occupations.
 - Not applicable to this project.
- 7. Signage Regulations
 - Signage will be minimal for property address and directional and identification signs for circulation
 - The plan complies with the ordinance.
- 8. Security Requirements
 - Must meet municipal security regulations.
 - Mr. Corchado's testimony addressed the security system.
 - The board will require a letter from the West Orange Police Department confirming the security plan is acceptable.
- 9. No Cannabis Consumption Areas
 - Cannabis consumption areas are not permitted on the property.
 - This is not proposed and would also likely be prohibited by state licensing.
- Mr. Barree stated the project meets all nine conditional-use requirements.
- Mr. Barree explained five existing site conditions that do not meet current zoning standards but already exist on the property.
 1. Side Yard Setback
 - Required: 10 feet
 - The existing building is closer than allowed, but cannot be moved.
 2. Parking Space Setback
 - Parking spaces related to the existing deli use are closer than permitted.
 - They will remain in place but be re-striped for better organization.
 3. Access Drive Location
 - Ordinance requires 5 feet from the side lot line.
 - The existing access drive is closer than permitted.
 4. Access Drive Width
 - Required width: 24 feet
 - Existing residential drive: 18 feet
 - However, it's a relatively low traffic point on the site, and won't have any detriment to continuing that condition.
 5. Impervious Coverage
 - The site is almost entirely impervious today.
 - The project will slightly reduce impervious coverage by adding landscaping.
- Three additional forms of relief are requested:
 1. Parking Lot Illumination
 - Some areas of lighting fall slightly below required levels.
 - The applicant is willing to work with board professionals to ensure compliance.
 2. Internal Sidewalks

- The site lacks sidewalks connecting parking areas to buildings.
- Because the cannabis area is fenced and not open to the public, pedestrian traffic will be minimal.
- Therefore the waiver is considered reasonable.
- 3. Loading Space Requirement
 - Ordinance assumes large tractor-trailer loading areas.
 - The facility will use smaller Sprinter vans.
 - A smaller loading area has been designed to accommodate those vehicles.
- Mr. Barree stated that the requested relief could be granted under:
 - C-1 Hardship (pre-existing site constraints)
 - C-2 Benefits vs. detriments criteria
- He argued the project advances several purposes of zoning, including:
 - Improving public health, safety, and welfare
 - Upgraded lighting
 - Repaved parking lot
 - Improved circulation
 - Landscaping improvements
- Providing space for diverse land uses
 - The township specifically identified this area as appropriate for cannabis cultivation.
- Supporting an emerging industry
 - There is a shortage of cultivators relative to retailers in New Jersey.
- Improving transportation circulation
 - Removal of a shed obstructing site access
 - Better parking layout.
- Encouraging efficient land use
 - The project reuses an older industrial building rather than building new infrastructure.
- Mr. Barree concluded that the requested relief will not harm the public good
 - Adequate parking
 - Improved site circulation
 - Controlled lighting to avoid nuisances
- Will not impair the zoning ordinance or master plan
 - Variances are minor and mostly design-related.
 - The project supports the 2019 Master Plan goal of balanced development, especially preserving non-residential uses in town.

BOARD QUESTIONS

- Chairman Bagoff asked why the application requested a parking space variance, since earlier testimony indicated that parking requirements were satisfied and even included an extra space. Mr. Barree clarified that no variance was requested for the number of parking spaces. The variance relates only to the location of existing parking space.
- Mayor McCartney asked who would determine the final decision regarding tree placement or removal. The board clarified that tree decisions would be reviewed by the Township Forester.

PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS

- Ms. Apte asked whether the exact percentage of impervious coverage on the site could be provided for inclusion in the official resolution. Mr. Sullivan said they could make their best effort to estimate the number, but did not want to re-survey the entire property.

- Ms. McGovern asked whether certain issues were design waivers or variances, specifically, internal sidewalks and drive aisle width. Ms. Apte said that these items fall within the zoning section of the code, meaning they require variances rather than design waivers.

The board concluded that:

- The variances would not harm the public good.
- The project does not impair the zoning ordinance.
- The proposal is consistent with the 2019 Master Plan.
- The development would:
 - o Upgrade an underutilized property
 - o Improve the parking lot and circulation
 - o Bring a new business to town
 - o Support local economic activity
 - o Improve public health, safety, and welfare.

Motion: Chairman Bagoff

Second: Mr. Guarino

Alper:	Y	Mayor McCartney: Y
Bagoff:	Y	Morgan: ----
Cardoza (Alt.2):	----	Noborine: Y
Guarino:	Y	Scarpa: Y
Kapferer:	----	Wilkes: Y
Klein:	Y	

● **PB 25-10 Trader Joe's**

Block: 157 Lot: 5 Zone: B2

457 Mount Pleasant Avenue

The applicant proposes to refit and reoccupy approximately 18,768 square feet of existing tenant space within the main building, including approximately 1,522 square feet mezzanine with a Trader Joe's retail grocery store.

PRESENTATION

- Howard Geneslaw, from FBT Gibbons, LLP, on behalf of the applicant.
- Trader Joe's operates about 600 stores in the U.S. and around 20 in New Jersey.
- The site is Mount Pleasant Plaza, which contains:
 - o A 29,000-square-foot one-story commercial building with a partial mezzanine
 - o A separate 3,000-square-foot commercial building.
- Access to the property is provided from:
 - o Mount Pleasant Avenue
 - o Pleasant Valley Way
 - o Mount Pleasant Place
- The Trader Joe's would occupy the former Metropolitan Plant Exchange space.
- A greenhouse structure previously attached to the site has already been removed.

- The entire property is 3.71 acres and zoned B2, where retail uses are permitted.
- The proposal includes:
 - o Reoccupying existing tenant space
 - o No expansion of the building envelope
- The former greenhouse area (about 9,000 square feet) will be converted parking spaces.
- 19 new parking spaces will be added, complying with zoning requirements.
- Minor C variances and some existing nonconforming conditions will remain.
- Some site elements will be improved.
- Additional proposals include:
 - o New trash enclosures
 - o A screen wall near the loading area
 - o Repairs or replacement of perimeter fencing
 - o A concrete pad for refrigeration equipment behind the building
- A new storefront design will be installed.
- Initially planned only for Trader Joe's space, but at the request of SPRAB, the design will extend across the entire building façade.
- Trader Joe's signs will be placed on the south and west building elevations.

Store Operations

- Planned store hours: 9:00 AM – 9:00 PM.
- Deliveries:
 - o 2–3 per day
 - o Limited to 7:00 AM – 9:30 PM due to nearby residential neighborhoods.
- Trash collection:
 - o 5 times per week in the morning
- Recycling collection:
 - o Twice per week in the morning
- Approvals the applicant seeks includes:
 - o Preliminary and final major site plan approval
 - o C variances
 - o Soil removal permit
 - o Tree removal permit
 - o Submission waiver for a fire hydrant run card (already shown on utility plans)
- The application plans to present four expert witnesses:
 1. Civil Engineer
 2. Architect
 3. Traffic Engineer
 4. Professional Planner
- The civil engineer, Tung-To Lam, entered on the record; he was sworn under oath. His credentials were accepted by the board and testified to the following:
 - Mr. Lam presented Exhibit A1, an aerial image dated January 7, 2026.
 - The property at 457 Mount Pleasant Avenue is highlighted.
 - Total site size: 3.71 acres.
 - Zoning: B2 General Business District where retail is permitted.
 - The former greenhouse structure was removed sometime between July and October of the previous year.
 - The project involves reoccupying the former Metropolitan Plant Exchange and No Limit Martial Arts spaces.
 - The size of the building remains the same.
 - The former location of the greenhouse will be used for:
 - o Parking

- Vehicle Circulation
 - Sidewalks
 - Landscaping
- Residential neighborhoods are located north and east of the site.
- To the south is the golf course across Mount Pleasant Avenue
- To the west is the gas station, storage facility, restaurants, and other commercial uses.
- Exhibit A2 dated January 7, 2026, shows a site plan rendering.
- Color coding includes:
 - Green: Landscaping
 - Dark tan: Trader Joe's portion
 - Light tan: Existing building areas remaining unchanged.
- Original total building area: 39,899 square feet
 - 8,980 of that was the greenhouse that was removed.
- New size of the building will be 30,919 square feet
- Trader Joe's store area is 17,245 square feet on the first floor.
 - Located in an L-shaped portion of the building.
- The property has four existing driveways, which will remain unchanged:
 - Two on Mount Pleasant Avenue
 - One on Pleasant Valley Way
 - One on Mount Pleasant Place
- Trucks cannot use the Pleasant Valley Way driveway, consistent with current site conditions.
- The darker gray areas on the site plan represent new asphalt surfaces being proposed.
- The entire parking lot will be milled and overlaid, with affected areas indicated by cross-hatching on the plan.
- Additional green infrastructure improvements are being added to comply with New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) requirements.
- Two rows of parking spaces directly outside the Trader Joe's building will use porous pavement as part of the stormwater management strategy.
- Building height and lot area remain unchanged, since no building expansion is proposed.
- There are no additional lots being added.
- Front yard setbacks remain unchanged, with the closest being the bagel shop building at 32.1 feet.
- Side yard setbacks also remain unchanged:
 - Bagel shop building side yard: 16.2 feet
 - Main building side yard: 56.5 feet
- Rear yard setback: 43.1 feet, unchanged.
- Maximum permitted building coverage: 40%
 - Existing building coverage: 24.7%
 - Proposed building coverage: 19.1%
 - This reduction is due to the removal of the former greenhouse structure.
- Maximum permitted lot coverage: 60%
 - Existing lot coverage: 83.8%
 - Proposed lot coverage: 82.1%
 - The decrease results from additional landscaping and green areas.
- Overall, impervious coverage on the site will decrease as part of the redevelopment.
- Required parking spaces: 188
 - Existing parking spaces: 165
 - Proposed parking spaces: 188, achieving full compliance.
- Breakdown of proposed parking:

- 180 standard (non-EV) parking spaces
 - 4 EV charging spaces
- Each EV space counts as two spaces under local credit rules
 - 4 EV spaces × credit of 2 = 8 spaces
 - 180 regular spaces + 8 credited EV spaces = 188 total
- Parking stall size requirement: 9x18 ft
- Some existing smaller spaces are 8x14.8 ft
- All newly constructed spaces will meet the 9x18 standard.
- Parking lot drive aisles must be 24 feet wide:
 - Some existing aisles are 21.3 feet wide
 - The lot will be restriped to bring aisles up to the required 24-foot standard.
- EV spaces were relocated further away from the building.
- This change was requested by the fire department during the SPRAB meeting.
- The reason was to reduce fire risk near the building if an EV vehicle fire occurs.
- Existing driveway access points remain unchanged.
- Driveways connect to:
 - Mount Pleasant Avenue
 - Pleasant Valley Way
- Four loading spaces are required under code.
 - One existing loading space for the bagel shop.
 - One proposed loading space for Trader Joe's.
 - Width: 15 feet
 - Length: 40 feet
- A monument sign for Mount Pleasant Plaza is currently non-conforming:
 - Required front yard setback: 10 feet
 - Existing setback: 3.3 feet
- Sign height requirements:
 - Minimum sign height: 2 feet
 - Maximum width: 6 feet
 - Existing width: 7.6 feet
- These existing nonconformities will remain unchanged.
- Existing perimeter fencing will be repaired and replaced where damaged.
- No new fence areas are being added.
- Fence height will remain 8 feet.
- Currently, dumpsters are scattered in the parking lot without designated enclosures.
- The redevelopment will construct two masonry trash enclosures to organize waste management.
- The enclosure locations generally correspond to existing dumpster locations.
- Some trash areas remain within the front yard area, consistent with existing conditions.
- Before designing the project, engineers identified new West Orange stormwater requirements.
- A discussion was held with CME engineer Mr. Hess regarding compliance.
- Water quality treatment:
 - 0.18 acres required to be treated
 - 0.27 acres will actually be treated, exceeding requirements.
- Stormwater quantity reduction:
 - Requirements for 2-year, 10-year, and 100-year storm events are all satisfied.
- Infrastructure changes:
 - Most existing stormwater pipes will remain.
 - New pipes will be added for the new parking areas.

- The site will be served by several utilities with existing “will serve” letters:
 - o Sanitary sewer – West Orange Township (letter dated November 2023)
 - o Telecommunications – Verizon (letter dated November 2023)
 - o Gas and electricity – PSE&G (letter dated November 2023)
 - o Water service – New Jersey American Water (letter dated November 2023)
- A new transformer will be installed to support electrical upgrades.
- Parking lot lighting standards require 2 foot-candles of illumination.
- The project proposes 0.5 foot-candles in some areas, creating the need for a variance.
- 20 new LED fixtures will be installed.
- Some existing lighting will remain.
- A light meter study was conducted to measure existing conditions.
- The lighting plan aims to eliminate dark spots while minimizing light spillover to nearby residential properties.
- The proposed lighting system will still improve safety compared to current conditions.
- Proposed landscaping includes:
 - o 30 canopy trees
 - o 110 shrubs
 - o 49 grasses (1-gallon containers)
 - o 73 perennials (1-gallon containers)
 - o 32 perennials (2-gallon containers)
- Tree removal and replacement:
 - o 5 trees will be removed
 - o 10 replacement trees will be planted
- Based on comments from the review letter, the applicant will install root ball barriers near trees adjacent to porous pavement.
- Several external approvals and communications have already occurred:
 - o Soil erosion certification issued (September of the previous year).
 - o NJDOT letter of no interest confirming no driveway changes.
 - o Essex County Planning Board:
 - Provided a letter stating no comments on the project.
 - Final approval will occur after the West Orange Planning Board resolution is issued.
- The project will use NJDEP Permit-by-Rule approvals, specifically:
 - o Permit-by-Rule 8 – Construction at or above flood hazard areas.
 - o Permit-by-Rule 39 – Underground utilities not crossing regulated waters.
 - o Permit-by-Rule 40 – Milling and repaving existing pavement.
- Reasons this approach is allowed:
 - o No increase in building size.
 - o No change to building footprint.
 - o No disturbance beyond existing limits of disturbance.
 - o No encroachment into regulated waterways or flood storage areas.
- The engineer explains that the project does not encroach beyond the existing limits of disturbance on the property.
- Existing curb lines around the perimeter of the site remain unchanged.
- The site will mostly maintain two-way circulation throughout the property.
- The only one-way circulation area is located on the eastern façade of the building, where angled parking currently exists.
- This one-way section will remain unchanged as part of the redevelopment.
- The existing stormwater system drains toward the South Branch of the Rahway River.
- The redevelopment does not alter the existing drainage patterns.

- Several parking spaces along that side do not currently have a curb line
- The applicant does not want to install new curbing because it could alter the existing drainage pattern.
- Instead, the proposal includes installing wheel stops to control vehicle positioning.
- Mr. Lam identifies seven parking spaces along the western edge that will receive wheel stops.
- One missing element is steep slope analysis.
- The reason it was not originally included is that the project does not disturb steep slope areas.
- A steep slope map and analysis will be provided as a condition of approval if needed.

BOARD QUESTIONS

- Vice Chairman Guarino asked if there is an area laid out that says "No Parking, Fire Zone." Mr. Lam said that if required, fire lane striping will be added.
- Vice Chairman Guarino asked if there would be detailed markings throughout the parking lots to show specific areas for pedestrian walkways. Mr. Lam confirmed pedestrian safety features like crosswalks are included.
- Vice Chairman Guarino asked if there would be vegetation islands throughout the parking area. Mr. Lam said landscape islands are present throughout the lot. Larger landscaped areas exist near the northwest corner outside Trader Joe's.
- Vice Chairman Guarino asked if there would be new lighting throughout the parking area. Mr. Lam said additional lighting will be installed across the parking area, including quad fixtures and single-head lights, as well as building-mounted lights.
- Vice Chairman Guarino asked if the vegetation areas will be set up with sprinklers, or if they will be manually maintained. Mr. Lam said landscaping is currently planned for manual maintenance. Irrigation could be installed later, but it is not yet part of the design.
- Council president Scarpa asked Mr. Lam if he could review pedestrian movement safety. Mr. Lam said they are proposing two crosswalks that will connect parking areas to the Trader Joe's entrance.
- Mr. Alper asked where the composting will be stored. Mr. Lam said the compost storage location was not yet finalized.
- Mr. Alper asked what measures would be taken for pest and odor control, such as scheduling for the removal of material. Mr. Lam said they will get back to the board about the requested information.
- Mr. Cardoza asked about the long-unmarked driving aisles in Exhibit A2, where cars may accelerate. Mr. Cardoza suggested traffic calming devices or signage. Mr. Lam agreed to work with the traffic consultant and board professionals to develop solutions.
- Mr. Cardoza raised concerns about a parking space located near the bridge exit area, where drivers would make sharp turns when exiting the site. Mr. Cardoza suggested removing the parking space or turning it into a compact space. Mr. Lam said it's a condition that exists, and they're not aware of any concerns.
- Ms. Kapferer asked regarding the pervious pavement. Has geotechnical testing been conducted to confirm if infiltration is possible in the area? Mr. Lam said that due to historic fill material on the site, infiltration is not recommended.
- Ms. Kapferer asked if there is an operation and maintenance plan and if yes, how often. Mr. Lam said they do and the manual includes the exact requested information. It was submitted and reviewed by the board.
- Ms. Kapferer asked if they are removing vegetation. Mr. Lam said no, they are adding vegetation.
- Ms. Kapferer asked if they are meeting the requirements of the ordinance with the

addition of trees. Mr. Lam said yes, they are.

- Mayor McCartney asked if they are aware of the noise ordinance regarding the trash collection in the morning. Mr. Geneslaw said they are aware and confirmed they will comply with the ordinance.

PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS

- Mr. Jordan asked in the case of a flood event, what mitigation set in place. Mr. Lam said floodwaters would affect the entire parking lot similarly under existing conditions.
- Mr. Jordan asked if they would be willing to provide the colored rendering of the steep slopes as a condition of the approval. Mr. Lam said yes.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- Robert Rashkes at 35 Oak Crest Rd asked if there will be designated bus drop-off areas for senior transportation, and if there will be benches outside the store for seniors waiting for buses. Mr. Lam said no benches are currently proposed, but are willing to add benches if required by the board. A designated drop-off area could be accommodated.

PRESENTATION

- The architect, Jeffrey Taylor, entered on the record; he was sworn under oath. His credentials were accepted by the board and he testified to the following:
- Mr. Taylor presented Exhibit A3 Sheet A101A, a proposed floor plan, dated January 6, 2026.
- The architect described the renovation of the former Metropolitan Plant Exchange and adjacent karate studio spaces.
- The façade will be significantly upgraded.
- The entire storefront will be replaced with new insulated glass and aluminum framing.
- The entire shopping center façade will be refinished
- Major architectural changes include:
 - o Trader Joe's will occupy both spaces combined.
 - o The building interior will be completely renovated.
 - o Only the exterior walls and roof will remain.
- There will be key internal spaces:
 - o Main sales area
 - o Beverage cooler
 - o Reserve freezer
 - o Produce cooler
 - o Back-of-house storage and operations
 - o Mezzanine for mechanical equipment
- Interior upgrades include:
 - o New finishes
 - o New mechanical systems
 - o New electrical systems
 - o New HVAC systems
- Because the building has a barrel-vault truss roof, most equipment will be located inside rather than on the roof.
- Delivery trucks will back into a screened loading area.
- The loading zone will be surrounded by an 8-foot concrete block wall.
- A canopy will cover the loading area to protect goods from the weather.
- Trader Joe's will have an indoor refrigerated trash room.
- This design prevents:

- Odors
- Pest issues
- Outdoor waste storage
- A separate outdoor trash enclosure will serve other tenants.
- A new transformer will be installed, which will house the new electric service.
- Condensing units for refrigeration will be installed on a ground-mounted pad.
- Equipment will be screened by an 8-foot sound-barrier enclosure.
- The refrigeration rack will be located in an indoor mechanical room.
- There will be fire department access to:
 - Existing sprinkler service
 - Water service
 - Gas service
- These services are located in a room above and between the mechanical room and the refrigeration condensing unit.
- Rooftop mechanical equipment will be minimal:
 - Only split-system HVAC equipment will be installed.
 - A VRF (Variable Refrigerant Flow) system will be located on a small flat roof section.
- The rooftop equipment will be screened by a 3'6" parapet wall to reduce visibility.
- Sheet A103 is presented which had already been submitted to the planning board.
- This sheet shows the proposed building elevations dated December 12, 2025.
- A new corner entrance will be added to improve visibility and accessibility.
- A new gabled roof section with a triangular pediment will be installed.
- A Trader Joe's illuminated channel sign will be mounted above the main entrance:
 - Approximately 2 feet high.
 - Positioned to be visible from the Mount Pleasant Avenue entrance to the shopping center.
- Existing paver sidewalks are currently uneven.
- They will be replaced with new concrete sidewalks.
- Protective traffic bollards will be installed to protect pedestrians walking along the storefront.
- The standing seam roof, currently verdigris green, will be:
 - Repaired
 - Refinished
 - Repainted in "Urbane Bronze."
- This renovation follows a SPRAP meeting to create a more cohesive and updated facade across the shopping center.
- Existing tenant signage on storefronts to the right of Trader Joe's will remain.
- Structural and visual upgrades include:
 - Installation of additional round columns.
 - Replacement of damaged fascia panels.
 - Releveling of aging cantilevered canopies that currently sag.
- The goal is to make the building appear newer and more visually cohesive.
- The corner entrance will include a Trader Joe's sign measuring 18 inches tall.
- This requires a variance because regulations allow only 8-inch-high signage in that location.
- The existing brick bearing wall will be cleaned and refinished.
- Existing metal banding will be refinished to match the updated facade.
- Roof shingles above the mansard roof will be replaced.
- Several existing doors (formerly serving the plant store) will be infilled with matching

brick.

- A new egress door will be added for the store's sales area.
- The existing bowstring truss barrel roof structure will remain unchanged.
- Exhibit A4 is presented, a revised elevation sheet dated January 6, 2026.
- The north side of the building will serve as the delivery and service area.
- A new 8-foot-high concrete block wall will be installed to screen the receiving area.
- Above the receiving area, a roof canopy will protect deliveries from rain and snow.
- A 15-foot-high canopy will allow trucks to pass underneath.
- New mechanical louvers will provide fresh air intake for HVAC systems, located near the mezzanine level.
- Exterior wall pack lights will be installed for illumination.
- The rear facade will be repointed and refinished with a new waterproof paint finish.
- A new overhead door on the left side of the building will provide access to an indoor trash room.
- The trash room will be conditioned (climate-controlled) and fully indoors.
- A 6-foot-high open-air trash enclosure will be constructed.
- A new pad-mounted transformer will supply power to Trader Joe's and adjacent tenants.
- The entire building's electrical service will be upgraded.
- A ground-mounted refrigeration condensing unit will be installed and it will be screened by an enclosure.
- The site lies within a flood hazard area, so measures are required for compliance with DEP regulations.

BOARD QUESTION

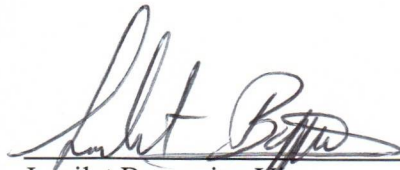
- Chairman Bagoff asked if the canopy design prevents birds from nesting. Mr. Taylor said the canopy will include a continuous soffit (ceiling), and this won't allow birds to nest.
- Mayor McCartney asked whether the bollards are closer to the building than the parking lot. Mr. Taylor said they are approximately 18 inches from the sidewalk edge. There will be ample space for accessibility and cart movement.
- Mr. Cardoza asked about safety around the baler in the receiving area. Mr. Taylor said only trained employees will use the baler. He included that Trader Joe's has over 600 stores, all using similar equipment. Additional safety measures such as rails can be installed to restrict access if necessary.
- Mr. Cardoza asked about light pollution affecting neighbors. Mr. Taylor said all exterior lights will be dark sky light fixtures. They will shine downward only.
- Mr. Cardoza asked if the spacing of the bollards are off and if shopping carts will be able to move easily through the bollards. Mr. Taylor said they are each 5 feet apart and it's to keep a car from going into the store.

PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS

- Mr. Jordan asked about the mechanical equipment in the back, if the appropriate freeboard has been provided. Mr. Taylor said yes, the only piece of equipment that they're putting in is the refrigeration condensing unit that'll be up on rails so that any flood water will go underneath the equipment.

The Application has been carried to the next Planning Board regular meeting on February 4, 2026, without further notice

ADOPTED: 4/15/26



Jamilet Baquerizo Xite
Planning Board Secretary